Mediating art and experience: art museums in Las Vegas

MEDIATING ART AND EXPERIENCE: ART MUSEUMS IN LAS VEGAS

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

Birkbeck College, University of London

June 2021

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Acknowledgments

When I suggested to my wife, Emily, that I undertake a PhD, I expressly promised that it would only take me three years. Through ten years of working on this thesis she has supported me and made it possible for me to (finally) finish. I cannot put my love for her into the words that would do it justice. She is amazing.

My children think their father is a strange person who spends too much time with "heavy art books" and has boring days when he does nothing but stare at a screen. I want to thank them for making me laugh and smile and reminding me that life is more important than screen time. Coco in particular has inspired me with intelligent questions and boundless positivity.

My parents have also been incredibly supportive in every way possible, starting when I was just a baby and continuing without pause until today and no doubt for very much longer.

And finally, I must thank my supervisors, Ben Cranfield and Scott Rodgers, without whom I would not have been able to undertake this project and who have been sure and steady guides through the many moments when I was lost.

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Introduction:

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1. What happens in Vegas no longer stays in Vegas

On 15 October 1998, the Bellagio Hotel-Resort-Casino opened in Las Vegas, Nevada, with a four-day party hosted by the resort's owner and principal designer, Steve Wynn. The event was widely covered in the Las Vegas, US and international press. Christened after the town of the same name on Lake Garda, supposedly one of the most beautiful places in Italy, the new resort was at that time the most extravagant resort-casino in Las Vegas costing $1.6 billion to build.[1] Within the gargantuan building were luxury shops such as Tiffany's, Armani and Chanel, eight restaurants, each with its own celebrity chef, a specially commissioned show by circus group Cirque du Soleil and, perhaps most spectacularly, fountains at the front of the building that 'danced' in time to opera and the hits of Frank Sinatra. In the overheated and exaggerated language of Wynn it would be "clearly, unequivocally, overwhelmingly, the most lovely, elegant hotel on the planet".[2] As part of the entertainment offerings at the casino, Wynn also established an art gallery, the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art (BGFA), exhibiting paintings by Monet, Van Gogh, Miro, Jasper Johns and Picasso, amongst others, bought by him specifically to attract visitors to his luxury-themed resort-casino.

Although not the first art museum in Las Vegas, the BGFA symbolised an avowedly populist approach to art museum institutions which attempted to integrate them into the city's experience economy.[3] The BGFA was very popular and in the nineteen months in which it was open and showing Wynn's collection, 630,000 people visited, myself amongst them, averaging 33,000

[1] Chase, Linda, *Picturing Las Vegas,* Utah, Gibbs Smith, 2009, p. 180
[2] Garfield, Simon, How Las Vegas Got the Culture Bug, The Mail on Sunday, 15 November 1998
[3] Danto, Arthur, Degas in Vegas, Danto, Arthur, *The Madonna of the Future,* Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2001

people every month.[4] The success of Wynn's art gallery was a direct and acknowledged influence on the establishment in 2001 of the Guggenheim Las Vegas in the Venetian Hotel-Resort-Casino. The Guggenheim Las Vegas was a joint enterprise between the New York-based art museum and the casino, as well as the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, with all partners hoping to reap financial rewards. For the Guggenheim, architecture was the prime framing mechanism. The Guggenheim Las Vegas consisted of two display spaces, nicknamed the Big Box and the Jewel Box, designed by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and described by the Guggenheim's director Thomas Krens as a new paradigm for cultural institutions.[5] Meanwhile, pre-dating these, the oldest art institution in the city, the Las Vegas Art Museum (LVAM), claimed to be the art museum for the city's inhabitants.[6] However, it also aspired to speak beyond the city to a national public. Formed as an artists' league in 1950, it became an accredited museum in 1975, and in 1997 it moved to a new location at the Sahara West Library. Once there it embarked on an ambitious, but ultimately futile, programme of exhibitions aimed at raising national awareness of the institution in order to make Las Vegas the preeminent centre for contemporary art in the United States.

In the summer of 1999, I was a tourist in Las Vegas and visited the Bellagio, where by chance I discovered the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art. Initially, I was attracted to the novelty of finding an art museum in a casino, and like many critics and commentators, before I visited I dismissed it as merely an amusing anomaly. I expected the experience to be kitsch and commercialised and, in some ways, 'unreal' but was very surprised to discover that not only were the paintings genuine but the Gallery was determined to communicate its authenticity to visitors. There were many elements of the BGFA that I recognised from other museums such as the reverential approach to the works on view, the careful lighting and the lavishly produced catalogue, but its presence in Las Vegas caused me to question the uses to which it put its aspirations to authenticity.

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[4] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p.24
[5] Press Release Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 20 October 2000
[6] Mann, James, Las Vegas Art Museum, Mission Statement, 1997, University of Nevada archive

Las Vegas is often described as an anomaly or an outlier to mainstream US society.[7] However, it has also been described as an exemplar for the United States where a series of experiments are always underway, some of which go on to become adopted in US society as a whole.[8] William Fox, for instance, describes a city, "where mainstream social parameters are bent and even violated… creating a unique laboratory of experimentation".[9] The drivers for this 'experimentation' are always financial and success is measured in terms of revenue. Dave Hickey, one of the loudest and best advocates of Las Vegas as an acceptable cultural centre (until he left the city), describes the relationship between the city and the US thus: "America … is a very poor lens through which to view Las Vegas, while Las Vegas is a wonderful lens through which to view America."[10] Most particularly in its relationship to commodification and leisure the city has come to stand for an aberrance to US culture, as well as the source of much that has become integral to architecture, culture, finance and politics in America. The Las Vegas art museums, however, were neither wholly exceptions nor exemplars, as they deliberately selected and utilised traditional concepts of museum authenticity but used these for commercial and leisure purposes.

This study asks how these three museums of art in Las Vegas used cultural capital signifiers to communicate their legitimacy as authentic art museums as part of a strategy to attract visitors in a commercialised tourist setting, and what does this tell us about the systems of 'capital' that are in tension within the establishment of art museums in the Las Vegas context. Increasing numbers of visitors to art museums, an acceptance of experiential pluralism as the norm for art museums, and expectations that museums should contribute to economies, both local and national, have sharpened debates around the relationship of art museums' core functions, such as interpretation, display, and community engagement that underpin the institutions' claims to significance, popularisation, and commercialisation where they claim to reach the widest possible

[7] Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century,* New York & London, Routledge, 2003
[8] Hannigan, John, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*, London, Routledge, 1998
[9] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p.150
[10] Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy,* Los Angeles, Art Issue Press, 1997, p. 22

audience by offering experiences that serve a leisure economy.[11] However, by using expected museum signifiers to prove their authenticity and become tourist attractions the Las Vegas art museums sought to short-circuit the legitimization/popularisation dichotomy and become both popular as well as authentic.

Authenticity and inauthenticity are concepts that are particularly relevant in Las Vegas. The city's detractors frequently dismiss the city as 'unreal' and that the casinos in particular, "freely celebrate their fraudulence".[12] Mikhail Poitrovsky, director of the Hermitage Museum, when interviewed about his museum's involvement in the Guggenheim Las Vegas, described Las Vegas as "a postmodernist city, if you define postmodernism as a fake that understands that it is fake".[13] Meanwhile Robert Hughes, no fan of the city, has described it as "built on simulation, quotation, weird unconvincing displacements, in which cultural icons are endlessly but never convincingly quoted".[14] For Las Vegan artist, Jeffrey Valance, the relationship between what is 'real' and what is not is attenuated in the city. "In a town where fake is the name of the game," he writes, "seeing something truly authentic seems all the more unreal."[15] The experience of the inauthentic and unreal in the city is deliberately encouraged by the casinos. Although it has a physical reality, the experience of being a visitor to Las Vegas is designed to be one that bends notions of authenticity, using recognisable visual prompts to encourage particular behaviours and experiences. This thesis will look at how these art museums responded to this extreme environment.

In order to take part in the leisure economy and act as tourist sites these art museums selected and adopted elements from 'traditional' art museums that emphasised their legitimacy through behaviours and signifiers that delineated 'authentic' art museum actions. In effect, they were

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[11] Witcomb, Andrea, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum,* London, Routledge, 2003
[12] Rugoff, Ralph, *Circus Americanus,* London, Verso, 1995, p. 3
[13] Bohlen, Celestine, Guggenheims Offer Novelty in Las Vegas, New York Times, 9 October 2001
[14] Hughes, Robert, Coming Soon: Wynn Win?, Time Magazine, 26 October 1998
[15] Storrie, Callum, *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas,* New York, I.B Tauris & Co, 2007, p. 208

adopting elements of 'museum-ness' in order to be players in the Las Vegas experience economy. They utilised recognised signifiers of institutional cultural capital, via forms of critically validated interpretation, architecture and display, to confer distinction upon themselves and claim authenticity and thereby differentiate themselves from other sites of visitation. To act as tourist sites, these art museums behaved as authentic art museums and not as reproductions. This thesis, therefore, explores elements and values that were utilised and adapted by them, while at the same time asks how these signifiers of cultural capital related to other signifiers of capital utilised by the casinos that surrounded them.

All three art museums are now closed. The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art in its original incarnation closed once Wynn sold the casino to rival casino mogul Kirk Kerkorian in 2000 and took his collection with him. The new owner of the casino outsourced the running of the gallery to a New York based company, Paper Ball, and it continues to show travelling exhibitions. Wynn briefly showed part of his collection at his new resort, The Wynn. However, it is currently not on public display and much of it has subsequently been sold. The Guggenheim Las Vegas's Big Box closed in 2003 due to financial difficulties after only showing one controversial exhibition, The Art of the Motorcycle. The space continues to be used for entertainment and is now a theatre and music venue. The second space, the Jewel Box, shut its doors in 2008, again for financial reasons, and in 2012 it became the Imagination Gallery which described itself as offering "art-centric entertainment" and "limited engagement installations".[16] It too is now closed and has been replaced by a lounge for VIP guests. The LVAM closed in 2009 when its ticket sales were unable to meet its running costs. Its former space at the Sahara West Library has been converted to library use. Its small collection is intact and is being stored at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and there have been infrequent reports that the museum might reopen.

[16] Zaller, Tom, Viva Art Vegas: Tom Zaller promotes culture with Image Exhibitions, Las Vegas Sun, 17 July 2013

Las Vegas is a notoriously brutal city where events, institutions or cultural offerings that do not show success through financial returns are swiftly closed and replaced. In Hal Rothman's phrase, "in Las Vegas it's always about money".[17] The closure of the Las Vegas art museums, can therefore be understood as prima facie evidence that those who see the city as a hostile environment for culture are right, and that art museums generally are ill-equipped to compete head-to-head with leisure or entertainment sites in a free-market, capitalist economy. Hence, it is possible to read the brief existence of art museums in Las Vegas as merely a series of failed experiments where high art institutions were inserted into the fabric of one of the most financially fixated cities in the world, were unable to act as authentic art museums because of their uneasy relationship to tourism, and were thus shunned by prospective visitors. Simply put, Las Vegas was a poor place for art museums because it is a city devoted to the experience economy without the validating structures that these institutions needed to survive.

However, through examining these unusual experiments in establishing art museums in a location that was considered highly inhospitable, we can see the ways that these museums of art created images of themselves in relation to pre-existing codes of value. Indeed, studies of peripheral art museums such as these, albeit with aspirations to emulate more established institutions, contribute as much as their larger cousins to the reproduction of the institutional concept of *the* art museum.[18] The institution of the art museum is frequently understood as a thing of stability, relating to beneficial purposes, that 'naturally' represents either national or regional identities through histories of art and this understanding is used to discuss all art museums. It is portrayed as an institution that embodies concepts of legitimacy through the provision of mediated aesthetic engagements, and which has the capacity to influence not only

[17] Rothman, Hal and Davis, Mike, eds. *The Grit Beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas,* Berkley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2002, p.14

[18] Candlin, Fiona, Independent Museums, Heritage and the Shape of Museum Studies, in Museums and Society, March 2012

those that visit but society more generally.[19] The forms and codes embedded in art museums largely derive from those institutions that have been successful, while those that close, if they are thought of at all, are considered the exceptions. This study contends that this focus inadvertently masks the full picture of art museums and presents an ideal of these institutions that is incomplete. Even the sickest body may enable us to understand the healthiest.

Much of the foundational academic critical work on museums is based on historical research and this informs much of the criticism on which museum theory is based.[20] Although these critical positions provide essential approaches to thinking about museums, they do not paint the whole picture for all museums at all times. The focus on, in some cases a handful, of long-lasting, well-established examples of art museums has led to narratives that portray them as institutions that are ill-suited or poorly designed to adapt to contemporary society. However, while defining art museum functions and purposes through reference to a fixed conception of an 'ur-museum' allows for ideals of authenticity and naturalisation, at the same time this approach serves to close potential developments that do not conform to these pre-existing ideals of museum behavior. The negative reactions to the presence of art museums in Las Vegas are an example of this.

Experiencing art, or shopping, drinking coffee and even gambling, are symbolic acts that have meanings beyond a simplistic actionality or physicality. As this study is interested in the ways that ideas of 'museum-ness' are being created, utilised and defined, the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his development of the idea of cultural capital, will act to underpin the case studies. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is accrued through the adoption of symbolic forms which can be manifested in, for instance, choices of food, wine, fashion or culture. These act as outward signs that can be read to distinguish people and even allocate them

[19] Sandell, Richard, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality,* London, Routledge, 2002; Ferguson, Bruce, W., Exhibition Rhetorics, Material speech and utter sense, Greenberg, Reece, Ferguson, Bruce, Nairne, Sandy eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996; Vergo, Peter, ed., *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Books, 1989
[20] Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Oxford, Routledge, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, *Museums and their Visitors*, London, Routledge, 1994

into social groups. Bourdieu's analysis of the processes at work in the cultural sphere remains crucial to understandings of the ways that art museums operate to distinguish sections of society.

This thesis will look at the art museums in Las Vegas not as anomalies but as expressions of the relationship between the popularization of culture and institutional legitimacy derived from the acquisition of cultural capital and asks how these relationships were utilised in the city as part of the leisure and tourist sector and what does this reveal about the systems of capital in the Las Vegas context. This introductory chapter will first approach current debates around the nature of art museum legitimacy and popularisation. Institutional isomorphism, whereby institutions in the same sector mimic each other to gain legitimacy, has become a way for art museums to display their authenticity – they are authentic because they are behaving in the same way as other art museums. The ways in which we think about the idealised art museum have been influenced by more established art museums in the ways in which they describe themselves and the ways that their experiences have been utilised in academic discourses to understand the actions of all art museums. I will then examine, the ways that the work of Pierre Bourdieu around cultural capital provides a road map for thinking about how this kind of symbolic capital is accrued and for what purposes. The nature of authenticity at art museums will then be explored, in particular how these concepts are utilised, rather than whether a form of authenticity can be defined for all museum-going experiences. Questions about authentic experiences are particularly crucial in Las Vegas and relate to the ways in which the art museums in the city attempted to connect to the wider tourist economy. Finally, I will examine how the city of Las Vegas has come to stand for popularisation, commodification and theming of contemporary urban life in the US and beyond and how these ideas are reflected in museums of art.

2. **Legitimisation, popularisation, isomorphism**

The relationships that museums have to concepts of legitimization (where they justify preconceived ideals of their 'proper' actions and goals) and popularisation (where they offer

experiences that appeal to the largest possible audience) have proved problematic for museums since their earliest inception. This relationship is frequently framed as a dichotomy between an educative and beneficial purpose as the legitimate way to engage with publics and popularisation which utilises tactics from entertainment or tourism to offer widely appreciated but potentially superficial experiences to reach the biggest possible audience.[21] These perspectives around the suitable functions of art museums are derived from understandings of them as an entity that can be conceptualised as having shared characteristics. Understandings of what constitutes legitimate or popularising functions rest on a concept of an ideal 'ur-museum' which influences all museums. Not only does this serve to smooth out the differences between the ways that institutions are understood, it also influences the ways that institutions understand and portray themselves. The authentic nature of art museums comes not from their individuality, therefore, but through mimesis.

This section will explore the ways in which ideals of legitimisation and popularisation at art museums have been discussed in the literature. Although frequently presented as opposing points on a continuum, this section will ask whether this accurately describes art museums. The pervasive isomorphism of art museums, whereby they seek to accrue legitimacy through shared behaviours and outlooks, means that deviations from the mainstream are discouraged and sometimes disparaged. Thus mimesis enables museums to assert their authenticity through being like other art museums. Finally, I will look at whether this polarisation between legitimisation and popularisation adequately explains the history of museums in the US or whether elements from leisure have always been embedded in art museums. The nature of Las Vegas and the functions of the art museums within a leisure economy meant that to be considered authentic they needed to echo the legitimising signifiers of the ideal museum.

[21] Witcomb, Andrea, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum,* London, Routledge, 2003

In Las Vegas, all three art museums deliberately associated themselves with larger, better-known museums of art. In the catalogue for the BGFA it was likened to the Frick. According to Peter Schjeldahl in the Introduction to the catalogue, Henry Clay Frick's "furies of acquisition", created a collection that is "inch by inch the best art museum in the world." However, for Schjeldahl, "now another remarkable collection comes together," and that is the BGFA.[22] In his curator's message of 2000, the LVAM curator, James Mann explicitly drew a parallel between the Las Vegas museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, saying that the LVAM intended to "carve out a definitive epoch-making place for itself in this new century, such as New York's Museum of Modern Art did with the art of the 20th century".[23] Meanwhile, the Guggenheim Las Vegas was influenced by its mother institution in New York, and in particular by the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Thomas Krens' ideas for 'global franchises' of the institution, or as he called them "discontinuous exhibition spaces".[24]

Such is the hyperbole that surrounds Las Vegas that suggesting that Wynn's collection was a good as Frick's, or that the tiny LVAM could become more significant than MOMA, might seem unworthy of comment. The association of these museums with more established, better known, institutions, was intended to confer status on the new museums, because it implied an equivalence. Yet, these boastful remarks also show a conscious institutional isomorphism, as they knowingly justify behaviours on the grounds that they are derived from the functions of *the* art museum, while at the same time demonstrating an understanding of what these behaviours constitute. Thus, likening of the Las Vegas art museums to older, larger US museums was not only a tactic to enhance the reputations of these institutions but was an active attempt to assert that they were authentic because they were the same as their more famous cousins.

[22] Lumpkin, Libby, ed., *The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art,* Las Vegas, Mirage Resorts Inc., 1998, p. 11
[23] Mann James, Curator's Message, Spring 2000
[24] Goodale, Gloria, Art Movement: Guggenheim has extended its tentacles to Las Vegas, The Christian Science Monitor, 19 October 2001

The art museum is frequently presented as an institution that embodies a form of permanence and consistency, that works towards a civic or social purpose through the preservation, display and interpretation of works of art, and that represents national or regional communities.[25] These ideals, in large part derived from the foundational Enlightenment concepts of 18th and 19th Century museums, have proved essential in establishing art museums as prominent institutions. In the 18th Century, Enlightenment philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller proposed that the beauty and autonomy of a work of art could transcend quotidian life and the act of appreciation could have an improving effect on the viewer.[26] The potential for all art museums to have universal appeal has been a core ideal since the earliest museums and from this concept have sprung ideas that museums must perform similar functions and appeal across all elements of society.

In the 19th Century it remained a common understanding that the most appropriate goals for art museums were that they be 'beneficial' or 'improving' for those who visited. John Ruskin, for instance, expressly determined that the purpose of the museum was to teach those who needed it most how to live their lives for the benefit of society as a whole.[27] Throughout the 20th and into the 21st Century, the deeply held ideal that art museums have a beneficial, progressive or authoritative influence at a personal, community or even on a national level remained embedded in almost all conceptualisations of museums' functions. The belief in the beneficial nature of art museums is expressed by Neil McGregor, while director of the National Gallery in London, when he says that "contact with really great works of art gives a kind of pleasure that changes people's lives".[28] The widespread impact and transformative nature of the engagement with a

[25] Sandell, Richard, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality,* London, Routledge, 2002; Ferguson, Bruce, W., Exhibition Rhetorics, Material speech and utter sense, Greenberg, Reece, Ferguson, Bruce, Nairne, Sandy eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996; Vergo, Peter, ed., *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Books, 1989
[26] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; Schiller, Friedrich, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* London, Penguin, 2006
[27] Ruskin, John, 'A Museum or Picture Gallery: Its Functions and its Formation' in ed., Cook, E.T. and Alexander Wedderburn, *The Works of Ruskin*, vol. 34, London George Allan, 1908,
[28] Quoted in, Serota, Nicholas, Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art, in Edwards, Steve ed. *Art and Its Histories: A Reader,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, p. 293

work of art is also emphasised by Jeffrey Deitch when director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, who asserts that when people engage with art, "their consciousness can be affected".[29]

However, although transformative experiences are possible, and few museum professionals would actively prevent sections of society from engaging, this kind of experience is not a populist one. For art museum directors such as the National Gallery's erstwhile director Nicholas Penny, the Getty's John Walsh, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Phillipe de Montebello, art museums are elite centres in much the same way that a university is described as an elite educational institution and therefore their impact is largely academic and personal rather than experiential and societal. For example, Phillipe de Montebello, while director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, confessed in 1997 to a "shudder of unease" whenever he heard museums described as places of entertainment rather than places of education.[30] From this perspective, it is the quality of the exhibition and works of art on view that is important and not necessarily visitor numbers, and the experiences offered are determined mainly by curatorial scholarship.

The centrality of the educational role of the art museums that de Montebello is alluding to has been taken as a given for many academics, such as George Hein and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,[31] and the role of education in US museums has been central to the ways in which they have described themselves since at least John Dana Cotton's *The New Museum* in 1917, if not longer.[32] The reach of museum education widened throughout the 1960s and 1970s as museum educators in the United States campaigned to make the experience of visiting a museum one that could enable learning for as wide a range of people as possible and education and interpretation

[29] Deitsch, Jeffrey, Artforum, Summer 2010, p. 280
[30] The Importance of Being Elitist, The New Yorker, 24 November 1997
[31] See Garcia, Ben, What we do best: Making the Case for Museum Learning in its Own Right, Journal of Museum Education, Vol. 37, No 2, Summer 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, *The Art of Seeing; An Interpretation of Aesthetic Encounters,* J. Paul Getty Museum Press, 1991; Hein, George, Museum Education, Macdonald, Sharon, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies,* John Wiley and Sons, 2010
[32] Cotton, John Dana, *The New Museum*, Woodstock, Elm Tree Press, 1917

continue to be central missions for many art museums. The Nevada Museum of Art, for instance, states that it "serves as an educational resource for everyone".[33] Usually the benefits of education in the museum are assumed to be self-evident, but when articulated are commonly framed by an assertion that they have a social utility and that they can empower individuals and communities.[34] These kinds of learning experiences at art museums underpin the ways in which these institutions define themselves and what they do.

However, that pedagogy should come to dominate the ways in which the beneficial experiences are defined and the ways in which those who work in museums, and very often those who go to them, construct the meanings of the institutions, was by no means certain. There has historically been a far greater permeability between the experiences of recreation and education at museums than is frequently acknowledged. Charlotte Klonk has shown that 19th Century British museums were frequently used by visitors as centres for leisure activities. Observers were scandalized by reports of visitors to the National Gallery in London having picnics, teaching their children to walk or propositioning members of the opposite sex and until the 1980's the museum was a favourite place for homeless people to sleep.[35] These actions were in direct contrast to the intentions of curators, directors and sometimes politicians, which were often to maintain art museums as places that were deliberately separate from 'popular' activities such as going to pubs, football matches, fairs or brothels.

The relationship that some early museums in the US had to leisure as well as learning was complex and ambiguous. For instance, established in 1784 with the Enlightenment goal of providing intellectual and moral improvement, Charles Wilson Peale's Philadelphia Museum was initially intended to represent the natural order of human society, where visitors could learn their

[33] Nevada Museum of Art, A Museum of Ideas, https://www.nevadaart.org/explore/about-the-museum/, accessed 21/6/18
[34] Hein, George, Museum Education, Macdonald, Sharon, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies,* John Wiley and Sons, 2010
[35] Klonk, Charlotte, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000,* Yale University Press, 2009

place in the world. However, visitor resistance to Peale's world view, and thereby lack of attendance, forced him to adopt new approaches in order to attract more people.[36] Peale recognised that, in order to educate, museums must first survive and this meant that his museum had to cater to a public whose tastes were being shaped by other attractions that were exhibiting crowd-pleasing freaks and oddities.[37] For Peale his museum would be "simultaneously a school in which the sovereign people could learn to make wise choices and a place of wholesome diversion for the thoughtless."[38] It is worth noting that when Peale died and the museum was forced to close, the collection was sold to showmen PT Barnum and Moses Kimball to be repurposed for an unashamedly entertainment function. However, it was also a place of learning and by the time of his death in 1827 it had become the primary resource for US natural history.[39]

The closure of early US museums, such as Peale's and the Western Museum in Cincinnati, which sought to straddle a line between recreation and education, seemed to justify critiques that they were merely centres of kitsch popular culture.[40] The assessment that in the US prior to the modern museum there were no educational institutions, only cheap mass entertainments, was most influentially propounded by George Brown Goode, who spent most of his career at the Smithsonian Institution. In Goode's *Museums History and Museums of History,* delivered to the American Historical Association in 1889, he presented early museums in the US as little more than trivial attractions aimed at entertaining a mass public.[41] In the early 20th Century, studies of US museums built on Goode's approach, and continued to put education very much at the centre of the institutions' mission while deliberately ignoring recreation. Nevertheless, the similarities between sites of leisure and museums persisted. Tony Bennett has pointed out the significant similarities between museums, fixed site amusement parks and Expositions or World

[36] Roberts, Lisa, C., *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum,* Washington, The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997
[37] Ibid., p. 25
[38] Ibid., p. 27
[39] Schofield, Robert, The science education of an enlightened entrepreneur: Charles Willson Peale and his Philadelphia Museum, 1784 – 1827, American Studies, Vol. 30, No.2, 1989
[40] Belk, Russell, M, *Collecting in A Consumer Society,* Oxford, Routledge, 1995, p. 107
[41] Goode, George Browne, *Museums History and Museums of History (1889),* Kessinger, 2010

Fairs of the late 19th and early 20th Century.[42] These similarities have, however, been downplayed, particularly by museums, as they seek to emphasis their supposedly legitimate functions.

As the needs of the professional community of scholars at museums became preeminent, rather than the desires of the visiting public, museums not only withdrew from the popular but came to see it, and describe it, as antagonistic to their core functions. Art museums that encouraged engagement with works of art through academic understandings were described as fulfilling art museums' proper function while those that offered pleasure and amusement were seen as facile or kitsch.[43] With the establishment of America's major art museums such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Boston Museum of Fine Art and The Art Institute of Chicago the separation of the engagement with art from leisure was further entrenched. Formed through the efforts of wealthy Americans, these institutions, perhaps inevitably, reflected their values. Art was seen as a way to strengthen peoples' spiritual nature and in so doing support the existing social fabric. From this perspective art should ennoble, and most certainly not entertain. Leisure has long been cast in opposition to work, making the pursuit of leisure something that can be seen as self-indulgent, frivolous and of no worth. In this light, these institutions sought to inspire people to use their leisure time for activities that would lead to their own, and hence society's, improvement. Definitions of museums as having to fulfil a social purpose, therefore, do not describe an inherent characteristic of art museums but reflect historical, institutional, decisions.

Major museums are often unusually well-resourced to tell their own stories and disseminate their own self-images. Through publicity, press statements and literature, they have long described themselves, their founders and those that work for them, as doing so for a wider good. Howard Hibbert's introduction to the highlights of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance, gives a short history of the directors and chairs of the board of trustees and the work they undertook for

[42] Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Oxford, Routledge, 1995
[43] Pine, Joseph and Gilmore, James, Museums and Authenticity, in Museums News, May/June 2007

the benefit of "the inhabitants of New York," who otherwise remain out of the narrative.[44] Meanwhile, the catalogue to the paintings at the Frick Collection emphasises the connoisseurship of Henry Clay Frick and his benefice in bequeathing his collection to the public. It does not mention the ways in which Frick amassed a fortune large enough to enable him to purchase the collection. His implacable hatred of organised labour, his actions during the Homestead Strike and his monopolistic business practices are not included.[45]

For the Met, the Frick, and many other US art museums, it is because they are making art available to the general public that they can claim to stand as symbols of democratic society in the United States. Thus, according to Nancy Einreinhofer, the US art museum is a national symbol,

> "because, not only does it represent the wealth of a great nation and that nation's belief in the preservation of culture, but it also symbolises the triumph of American democracy, for it stands with its doors open, its treasures gathered for the benefit of all people".[46]

This management of the definition of art museums' purposes deliberately frames them within discourses of democracy, social purpose and aligns them with unspoken national chauvinism.

However, in the 1990's understandings of museums, that had largely been derived from and controlled by museums themselves, began to be interrogated in earnest by academics in order to uncover some of their underlying founding principles and thereby better understand the modern art museum. Academics such as Peter Vergo, Ivan Karp and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill began to argue for an increased emphasis on visitors and their experiences as opposed to an emphasis solely on the preservation and interpretation of objects.[47] Rejecting previous approaches to museum studies, this wave of museological writing moved beyond discussions of the museum's

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[44] Hibbert, Howard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,* London, Faber and Faber, 1980
[45] Skrabec, Quentin, *Henry Clay Frick: The Life of a Perfect Capitalist*, Jefferson, McFarland & Co, 2010
[46] Einreinhofer, Nancy, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, London, Leicester University Press, 1997, p. 19
[47] Vergo, Peter, ed., *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Books, 1989;

methods and focused more clearly on the purposes of the museum. In attempting to define (or redefine) the purposes of museums these academic writers proposed that it is through a greater emphasis on exploring who the institutions are for that their functions can be found. Although, largely, formulated outside of the museum-world, this academic discourse, indeed the formation of museum studies itself, has had a profound influence on art museums and their operations.

Museums began to be described by academics such as Carol Duncan and Richard Sandell, as part of Michel Foucault's disciplinary complex, or as outlined by Tony Bennett, an exhibitionary complex.[48] This influential reading claims that the legitimising tendencies of art museums are implicit in creating and disseminating messages intended to preserve dominant ideologies. In this reading museums take part in maintaining a societal status quo through embedding social distinctions and hence inequalities. In these descriptions of art museums, they are doomed to alienate large swathes of society for whom they cannot speak. According to this academic discourse, the very authority that underpinned museums' capacity to provide learning opportunities also caused many people to be alienated by them.

Studies of the histories of well-established museums were key to these academic engagements with art museums. For instance, Carol Duncan, Tony Bennett and Jeffrey Abt place the opening of the Louvre to the French public in 1789 as the pivotal moment in the development of the modern art museum, and explicitly link the experience of one of the largest museums in the world (then and now) with those of all other museums.[49] Other moments that are often described as key to the history of art museums are the foundation of the National Gallery in London in 1824, followed by the foundation of the South Kensington Museum, now the V&A, in 1852, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929, as part of the progressive rise of

[48] Sandell, Richard, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality,* London, Routledge, 2002; Duncan, Carol, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London, Routledge, 1995; Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Oxford, Routledge, 1995, Chapter 2

[49] Abt, Jeffery, The Origins of the Public Museum, in, McDonald, Sharon, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006; Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Oxford, Routledge, 1995; Duncan, Carol, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London, Routledge, 1995

large, national institutions. However, although the rise of national museums to their prominent role in museum hierarchy has been neither linear nor inevitable, they have come to exert a huge influence on the ways that all art museums are conceived or conceive of themselves.

While, these studies are important and seminal, and the change of focus of museum studies towards understanding museums through the experiences of visitors remains critical, academic discourses around legitimisation and popularisation at art museums have focused on the museum as an institution that utilises its authority and authenticity for purposes of both social knowledge and power. However, these discourses perpetuate polarising positions between popularisation and legitimization. Yet, the kinds of experiences that are permissible, and sometimes encouraged, in modern museums of art are neither wholly the disinterested Kantian experiences propounded by art museums, nor necessarily coercive and hegemonic. Actors in period costume, interactive displays and games, animatronics and re-creations of all sorts, music and other audio experiences, displays which adopt a thematic rather than chronological approach, the touching of objects, visitor input into which items are displayed and child-focused entertainments such as puppet shows, singing sessions and craft making sessions have now come to be seen as the norm, particularly in science and natural history museums.[50]

Concerns that heritage sites are becoming too similar to, or indeed indistinguishable from, leisure sites in their attempts to broaden their visitor demographic are frequently conjoined with concerns that art museums have become too commercial. Andrea Fraser, for instance, bemoans that US art museums are in "direct competition – or even cooperation – with commercial entertainment and luxury goods industries".[51] Sociologist Vera Zolberg sees large crowds as impairing the experience of the works of art and encouraging art museums to pander to popular

[50] Conn, Steven, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010
[51] Fraser, Andrea, A Museum is Not a Business. It is Run in a Business-like Fashion, Townsend, Melanie, ed., *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Toronto, Banff Centre Press, 2003

tastes, thus abandoning their position of academic excellence, and thereby losing the elements that make them special and important. According to Zolberg,

> "For many long-time museum goers, the climate they associate with it is impaired by overly large numbers of visitors and the disturbance they create. A second central concern is the quality of works that gain admission to their halls, and these may seem more appropriate for shopping malls, Disneyworlds or Jurassic Park than for cultural institutions".[52]

Therefore, from this standpoint, exhibitions that are "trivialising and making banal" the experience of engaging with works of art, by being too populist, or not sufficiently academic, are threatening to delegitimise the fundamental pedagogic, aesthetic and beneficial purposes of art museums. [53]

Not all academic readings of museums adhere to understandings of the relationship between art museums and leisure that recoils from populism and some embrace the entertainment orientation which is Las Vegas's hallmark. For these writers on leisure and tourism, through altering the emphasis of the institution from education to recreation, art museums can become more inclusive thus reaching more people. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bella Dicks, for instance, maintain that there is no fundamental separation between the activities of museums and the activities of other leisure institutions.[54] Dicks, particularly, sees barriers to mass inclusion being broken down and the experience of culture becoming accessible to more people as it becomes a leisure activity. However, this does not represent a change to the ability of the museum to make those who attend feel culturally knowledgeable, rather it represents a change in

[52] Zolberg, Vera, Museums Face to Face with the Millennium: The View of a Sociologist, Museum Management and Curatorship, Vol 13, No.2 June 1994, p. 184-185
[53] Jones, Jonathan, Lost in the hubbub: London galleries patronise us with this PR-led populism, The Guardian, 10 July 2015
[54] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, p. 7

the means through which it does this.[55] Significantly, the academic discourses about the relationship between art museums and their tourist publics continues to propose a beneficial function for museums of art, albeit one that operates in parallel and can be harnessed to achieve economic goals. The inclusion of art museums as part of a leisure function, in this reading, sets them alongside other forms of leisure so that learning can be achieved by other means. In effect art museums should become Trojan Horses for aesthetic pedagogy.

Rather than see traditional, legitimising practices as being in conflict with more popularising leisure functions, Nick Prior attempts to plot a middle course. For Prior, museums have entered a new phase of their development which combines elements of their traditional roles with concepts of contemporary modernity. According to Prior, the museum is "a radically syncretic institution in which variant tendencies coexist – aesthetic contemplation *and* entertainment, connoisseurship *and* consumption, private delectation *and* public provision".[56] Prior uses Charles Jencks' concept of double-coding to describe the ways in which art museums relate to their audiences. Jencks developed this concept in relation to the built environment, describing double coding as: "The combination of modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects."[57] However, Prior's reading does nothing to challenge the dualistic understanding of art museum functions, only proposing that the two approaches can co-exist. The novelty in his double-coded art museum is that it can perform more than one function, although the functions it performs remain part of the popularising/legitimising continuum.

A syncretic merging of populism and legitimacy to produce a new type of museum has not taken place. Although museums have absorbed many lessons from shopping malls, theme parks, restaurants and most recently on-line offerings, and it may be easier to find a seat, a toilet or a

[55] Dicks, Bella, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2003
[56] Prior Nick, Having One's Tate and Eating It: Transformations of the Museum in a Hypermodern Era, McClellan, Andrew, *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium,* Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 63
[57] Jencks, Charles, *What is Post Modernism*, Academy Editions, 1986, p.14

cup of coffee in a museum than at any time previously, these remain firmly in the service of institutions' 'core' functions. As explored in the case studies below, while hybridity is a recognised aspect of the city of Las Vegas,[58] new forms or functions were not developed at the Vegas art museums. In the case studies, the aspects of the art museum emphasised by each Las Vegas museum of art, will be examined.

The process of recreating something requires understandings of the thing being recreated and choices as to what to recreate. Claims to legitimacy require the adoption and display of signifiers that align institutions with ideals of *the* art museum. The creation of definitions of 'museum-ness', that is the signifying actions and purposes that define an art museum, are dependent on understandings of what constitutes genuine museum activity and what does not. Attempts to delineate the kinds of activities and experiences that are permissible in art museums and to exclude those activities that were deemed to be not acceptable, legitimizes both visitors and institutions. The institutional isomorphism of museums allows them to claim authenticity through the similarity of their actions and intentions. Hence, approaches to the supposed continuum between legitimization, where a museum acts in a beneficial way often through the provision of pedagogic opportunities, and popularization, where visitor numbers are boosted by entertaining and superficial offerings, have become embedded in the very definition of what constitutes art museums.

In academic literature around museums there is a tendency to search for a universalizing ideal of the art museum, which can then be used as the basis to describe and define all art museums. While acknowledging that there are many different components that make up the totality of art museums, concepts of what constitutes all art museums have been developed which refer to the art museum as a singular entity. Differences are thus smoothed out so that all similar organisations can be included. As Rudolph Starn rightly points out, this has meant that "museum

[58] Cheshmehzangi, Ali, Urban Identity as Global Phenomenon: Hybridity and Contextualisation of Urban Identities in the Social Environment, Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment, Volume 25, 2015

studies tend to treat 'the modern public museum' as a fixed type".[59] Kate Hill, for instance, asserts that, "we should think about the positions which *the* museum, the objects, and wider discourses make available for a variety of people within *the* museum."[60] Hill, who is investigating claims by art museums in the UK to be working in partnership with communities, conceptualises the museum as a singular type of institution in order to describe all of their actions in different locations. Conceptualising art museums as a totality gives shape and form to the type. Questions around the roles, functions and definition of art museums are, therefore, frequently approached in the literature through references to ideals of *the* art museum, encouraging a pervasive isomorphism.

Furthermore, concepts of *the* art museum derive from examples of national, long-standing, large institutions, which frequently have sophisticated methods for defining and expressing their own narratives. Models drawn from studies of these institutions are applied to the experiences of art museums of varying sizes, locations, purposes and histories. Piotor Piotrowski and Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, for instance, present a critique of art museums based on their outline of the history of art museums that includes the "paradigmatic examples" of the Louvre, the National Gallery in London as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Art and the Arts Institute of Chicago. These examples allow them to draw conclusions that *the* art museum is a "tool of imperialism and colonialism" and a "stronghold of patriarchalism, masculinism, xenophobia and colonialism".[61] Yet, if these accusations are justified at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, this may not mean that they automatically hold true at The Nevada Museum of Art in Reno.

[59] Starn, Randolph, A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies, The American Historical Review, Vol. 110, No. 1, February 2005, p. 78
[60] Hill, Kate, Thinking about audience and agency in the museum: models from historical research, Current Issues in European Cultural Studies, 2011, emphasis added
[61] Murawska-Muthesius, Katarzyna and Piotrowski, Piotor, eds., *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum,* London, Ashgate, 2015, p. 3

The un-reflexive tendency to equate the experiences of a large art museum with the experiences of all museums can be seen in an article in 2015 in the *Tate Etc.* magazine to announce the opening of a new wing of Tate Modern. The article posed the question "What is the Museum of the Future?" It contained sweeping statements about the increasing relevance of the art museum in contemporary Western life, using the experiences of Tate Modern as a template for considering all museums.[62] In this instance, the experiences of Tate Modern in London are assumed to illustrate the sector as a whole, an approach that might seem uncomfortable, even absurd, coming from an art museum in a small town. Yet, as pointed out by Fiona Candlin, in reference to the UK, small museums "are rarely, if ever, mentioned in analyses of architecture, professional practice, contemporary display or the role of museums".[63] Candlin's conclusion that the omission of smaller, local institutions "homogenises museum studies, limiting its concerns and scope," can equally be ascribed to the United States. Grand narratives about museums define the parameters by which the legitimacy of all art museums are judged without taking into account the experiences of smaller institutions.

The development of public understandings of the purposes and actions of well-established and significant art museums are important because through mimesis organisations within the same sector adopt common traits. This process of institutional homogenisation is described by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell who point to "the startling homogeneity of organisational forms and practices" and attribute it to the development of practices during the expansion of a particular sector and then the conformity of new entrants once that sector is established. [64] Furthermore, although they concede that early adopters of organisational change may do so to improve performance, "as innovation spreads, a threshold is reached beyond which adoption

[62] Tate Etc., What is the Museum of the Future, Issue 35, Autumn 2015
[63] Candlin, Fiona, Independent Museums, Heritage and the Shape of Museum Studies, Museums and Society, March 2012, p. 28
[64] Di Maggio, Paul and Powell, Walter, The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organisational Fields, American Sociological Review, Vo. 48, No. 2, April 1983

provides legitimacy rather than improves performance".[65] Institutions, through a process of mimesis, develop traits that act to confer legitimacy and status because they are derived from similarities not differences.

DiMaggio and Powell identify three types of isomorphism in institutions; coercive isomorphism; mimetic isomorphism and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism occurs due to political influences. Mimetic isomorphism takes place when goals are ambiguous or when there is symbolic uncertainty which leads organisations to adopt the behaviour of other organisations both to provide solutions for specific problems but also to demonstrate that they are behaving in ways that are considered to be legitimate. New organisations actively model themselves on existing organisations that they perceive as more legitimate. Normative isomorphism occurs through professionalisation. The hiring of individuals with similar educational backgrounds or professional qualifications entrenches this process. According to DiMaggio and Powell, "in most situations, reliance on established, legitimated procedures enhances organizational legitimacy and survival characteristics".[66] This means that for new art museums, the influence of the goals and practices of already existing, longer established institutions is impossible to shake off, but also that on an institutional level greater similarity to other organisations is desirable.[67]

The adoption of an isomorphism derived from examples from larger well-established art museum institutions results in a convergence of behaviours by art museums as they adopt approaches that derive from centralised examples and justify those behaviours on the grounds that they are part of the role of the idealised art museum. For numerous US museums established in the late 19th Century two models were paramount. Many art museums aspired to be like the National Gallery in London and sought to emulate its approach to the collection of works of aesthetic importance, the academic and intellectual rigour of its displays and in most

[65] Ibid. p. 148
[66] Ibid., p. 156
[67] Sieweke, Jost, Imitation and Processes of Institutionalisation – Insights from Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, sbr 66, January 2014

instances its classical architecture. However, other museums took as their major influence the Victoria and Albert Museum. The major influence of this institution was not only in its choice to focus on the applied arts but on its specific intention to have a beneficial influence on working people by encouraging them to be self-educating in subjects that would be useful to industry. However, once this early mimetic, stage of museum development had taken place the influences of these organisations became less overt and more normative.[68]

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for example, has continuously hired directors who have worked in larger, more established art museums. In 1960 the museum hired James Johnson Sweeney, previously director of the Guggenheim, as its director. He was replaced in 1969 by Phillipe de Montebello, formerly curator of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and in 1974 he was replaced by William Agee of the Pasadena Museum of Art who in turn was replaced by Peter Marzio formerly of the Corcoran Gallery in Washington.[69] Its current director is Gary Tinterow, who joined from the Met in New York. The hiring of museum professionals introduces organisational practices as well as professionalised perspectives, that derive from longer-established organisations. Although the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston is not exactly the same as the other institutions and local influences have contributed to some degrees of differentiation, its institutional behaviours have developed against the backdrop of desires to emulate other institutions.

The contradiction between Enlightenment ideals of the universal nature of art appreciation and distrust of popularisation can be understood as a debate over the most appropriate kinds of experiences at art museums. Paradoxically, despite continued adherence to the alleged universality of art, an increase in the number of visitors is often described not as a success for art museums but rather as a challenge to their legitimacy by undermining their scholastic integrity.

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[68] Curran, Kathleen, *The Invention of the American Art: From Craft to Kulturgeschichte, 1870-1930,* Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, 2016; Rice, Danielle, Balancing Act: Education and the Competing Impulses of Museum Work, Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2003

[69] Leeper, John Palmer, ed. *Collecting: A Texas Phenomenon,* San Antonio, Mation Koogler McNay Art Museum, 1986

Fears of a 'tyranny of the majority' whereby art museums pander to the lowest common denominator, leading to falling standards of exhibitions, display and research, the absorption of the art museum into the leisure industry or the abandonment of museums' socially directed functions, informs many of these critiques of mass attendance at art museums regardless of whether the critic wishes to see changes or wishes art museums to remain unchanged. [70] The distinction conferred by engagement with art through a visit to an art museum carries less social weight if a majority of people take part.[71]

The signifiers that distinguish art museums from other institutions are embedded in seemingly intransigent concepts as to their goals and functions developed during the Enlightenment and frequently reasserted since then and yet, as society changes, these codes are struggling to become updated. The potential relationships between art museums and their publics have only become further problematised as culture has become positioned more widely as part of economic development strategies.[72] Institutional isomorphism helps new institutions because it provides a framework for conceptualising goals and functions. However, this framework is not necessarily related to the most efficient and successful actions but those that confer legitimacy. Therefore, the dichotomy between leisure and learning has developed as a major signifier of authenticity, despite being neither enforceable nor accurately reflecting the ways in which visitors utilise art museums. It is authenticity, of objects, architecture, display or interpretation, that acts as the differentiating feature that allows for understandings of how to think about the experiences that are possible. Yet, as art museums have become absorbed into an economy of authenticity in which genuine experiences are the capital in which they trade, the codes and messages that they

[70] See for instance, Lukes, Timothy, W., *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002; Mason, Rhiannon, Cultural Theory and Museum Studies, McDonald, Sharon, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006; Groys, Boris, *Art Power,* Cambridge Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2008; Fyfe, Gordon, Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums in McDonald, Sharon, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006; Tepper, Steven, *Not Here Not Now, Not This: Protest Over Art and Culture in the America*, University of Chicago Press, 2011

[71] See for instance Artforum, Summer 2010

[72] Miles, Malcom, *Limits to Culture,* London, Pluto Press, 2015

conveyed to visitors, need to convey distinction so that visitors know that they are engaged in something different from the other sites of visitation. Examining smaller, less successful institutions allows us to explore the elements that they thought were worthwhile and question which cultural signifiers these institutions believed would confer distinction. The writings of Pierre Bourdieu will help us to understand the complex ways in which these signifiers were used in Las Vegas.

3. **Bourdieu: Cultural capital and tourism**

In 2012, increasingly expensive exhibitions, falling membership and a financial black hole that was eating into its endowment meant that the Indianapolis Museum of Art faced an uncertain future. Although nationally respected and with an internationally recognised collection of Asian artefacts and contemporary art, the art museum found itself a "house of the few, not the house of the many".[73] Its trustees, in an effort to put the institution on a better financial footing and attract more visitors hired a new director, Charles Venable. Venable set out to radically transform the museum, starting by rebranding it Newfields and emphasising its extensive parks and open spaces rather than the art museum. Over half of the curators left and the changes were slated as "one of the greatest travesties in the art world in 2017".[74] When Venable took over as director in 2012, entry to the museum was free. Yet for a city of about two million people only 6,000 were members. Venable asked a similar question to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in *The Love of Art;* if the art museum was open to all and celebrated the universality of appreciation of art, why were so few people visiting?

The Love of Art was published in 1968 and was based on research undertaken in France in the mid-1960s, yet its findings continue to resonate because they describe institutions that derive their legitimacy from cultural capital, which continues to contribute to the exclusion of some

[73] Russeth, Andrew, The Ringmaster! Is Charles Venable Democratizing a Great Art Museum in Indianapolis – or Destroying it? Artnews, 9 July 2019
[74] Capps, Kriston, Spare a Thought for the Real Museums, Bloomberg City Lab, 29 December 2017

groups, despite claims for universality. Indeed, as we have seen, academic discourses around museums have called explicitly for changes to their practices so that they can appeal to a greater demographic. Having identified the deliberately divisive nature of art appreciation and art institutions, it was hoped that changes could be made to the practices and intentions of art museums that would overcome institutional inequalities. However, Bourdieu himself pointed to the gap between theory and practice and the problems relating to deep structural sociological changes[75] and despite the efforts of academics, museum staff, trustees and often governments, much of the art within art museums continues to be enjoyed by only some sections of society.[76] In the United States in 2019 art museum visitors were most likely to be people with above average incomes, above average educations, and most likely to be white. The greater the educational level and income level, the greater percentage of the art museum audience.[77] It has been beyond the ability of art museums to significantly effect structural change so as to change the demographic of their visitors.

The Love of Art identified those who are successful in the cultural sphere and succeed in turning their tastes into natural assets which have the appearances of natural dispositions. Indeed, one of the recurring themes of Bourdieu's work is how social elites are produced and sustained in advanced industrial and post-industrial societies. His major work on this theme, D*istinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* explicitly critiques Immanuel Kant's idea that taste is universal and that everyone can appreciate beauty within a state of disinterestedness.[78] Rather, Bourdieu proposes that taste is the product of social forces used to separate groups within society and tautologically to provide justifications for these separations. Using sociological research, Bourdieu sets out to show that aesthetic taste is inextricably linked to class.

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[75] Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic, *An Invitation to Reflective Sociology,* Polity Press, 1992, p.70
[76] Schuster, J. Mark Davidson, The Public Interest in the Art Museum's Public, in *New Research in Museum Studies: An International Series, Art in Museums*, London, The Athlone Press, 1995
[77] National Endowment for the Arts: *US Patterns of Arts Participation,* December 2019
[78] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu developed a theoretical framework to outline how the dominant class differentiates itself through the formation of tastes in areas such as food, culture or fashion. The hierarchies of aesthetic value, as demonstrated through lifestyle choices, maintain, validate and produce the distinction and social separation of classes. Bourdieu identifies three concepts - habitus, field and capital - which enables him to theorize the relationships between museums and their publics. The concept of habitus with its emphasis on the way in which agency is embodied is central to Bourdieu's cultural investigations. Habitus is defined as "systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures, principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representation which can be objectively regulated".[79] Habitus is the way in which people perceive the world. These 'conditions of existence' are shaped by their social location, which constitutes the people or institutions around them. Bourdieu refers to this as 'field' which can be defined either physically or organisationally. Fields are a network of objective relations between positions. Therefore, human activity derives from an engagement between habitus and field.

As habitus and field operate in a society in which things are valued differently, they are referred to by Bourdieu as 'capital'. While Bourdieu did not consider himself as a Marxist, he built on Marx's concepts of capital. Bourdieu extended Marx's emphasis on economic capital to other forms of capital, notably social and most germane to my own interests in the field of art, cultural. For Bourdieu, symbolic elements such as accent, clothing, tastes or material possessions combine to create collective identity and social hierarchy. Cultural capital is symbolic because the value that is given is arbitrary but nevertheless it is a form of capital because it contributes to rewarding those who have it. For Bourdieu cultural capital is a resource which brings power rather than being a relationship of power, such as economic capital, which yields a marketable resource. Thus, just as with economic capital, cultural capital creates social inequalities.

[79] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Outline of the Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 2

Symbolic capital is unlike cultural economic or social capital in that it refers to reputation or prestige. However, it is derived from the conversation between the other forms of capital. Bourdieu defined symbolic capital as "the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate".[80] It is not a completely different form of capital but exists as the legitimised form of other capitals. Bourdieu recognised that, for organisations, symbolic capital could be used to position themselves where different types of capital are appreciated. For art museums symbolic capital is closely tied to a hierarchy which puts store in interpretations and display of works of art for specific publics.

Bourdieu defined cultural capital in several different ways throughout his career. However, most scholars now agree that the concept can be defined as "institutionalized, widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, forms of knowledge, behaviours, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion".[81] Within this symbolic economy, concepts of social class become legitimized as concepts of status and traits associated with high-status groups become valorised. For Bourdieu, with the rapid urbanisation of Western society these signs and symbols of lifestyles have become increasingly important to classify people. This process includes cultural and artistic signifiers and contributes to opinions that, for instance, rank art museums as more culturally significant than casinos.

Bourdieu described three states of cultural capital, embodied capital, an objectified state and an institutional state. Cultural capital can be held by an individual, a work of art or an institution. Embodied capital is knowledge, connoisseurship or artistic taste and is held by an individual. This kind of capital or taste can be acquired or cultivated and may be transmitted across generations through education or museum visiting. The objectified state describes material objects such as paintings or novels and originates in the work of art. This is a crucial way to

[80] Bourdieu Pierre, Social Space and Symbolic Power, Sociological Theory, Vol 7, No. 1, 1989, p. 17
[81] Lamont, Michele and Lareau, Annette, Cultural Capital: Allusions Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments, Sociological Theory, Vol. 6, No. 2, Autumn, 1988, p. 156

share knowledge as it unites people who can share the medium (even in reproduction) as they have the capacity to understand it. Finally, institutional states of cultural capital describe cultural capital that is sanctioned such as academic qualifications. This form of cultural capital can be exchanged into other forms of power. It can also describe knowledge held by institutions such as art museum institutions which act to guarantee the cultural value of the objects they hold and to differentiate those things which are worthy of attention and those that are not.[82] Institutional states of cultural capital can also act to guarantee the importance not just of the institution but also of engagements with it. The Las Vegas art museums aspired to utilise the institutional form of cultural capital.

Art museums, therefore, are an integral part of a process through which visitors gain cultural capital by engagement with works of art. Through a combination of habitus and field, visitors are enabled and encouraged to use their knowledge, accrued through education or via visits to art museums, which in turn increases symbolic cultural capital and this acts to differentiate individuals and groups. However, as Bourdieu describes, cultural capital is not something that rests exclusively with individuals or groups. The frameworks that create distinction operate not only on visitors but also on institutions. The knowledge at art museums, usually defined as academic knowledge, acts to produce cultural capital which differentiates these kinds of institutions from others and potentially from each other. Just as individuals might utilise fashion, cuisine or material objects to differentiate themselves or align themselves with particular groups, so too do art museums utilise forms of symbolic capital such as architecture, interpretation or display choices. The distaste for Venables' changes at Newfields rests in no small part on value judgements of the symbolic cultural capital signifiers that are in play. Paintings can be more culturally significant than movies, museums are superior to parks, mass visitation is not a substitute for academic rigour.

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[82] Bourdieu, Pierre, The forms of capital, Richardson, John, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood, 1986

In the Las Vegas examples, this process played into a wider tourism offering and worked towards not only the (attempted) legitimization of these institutions but also to the popularization of the museum-going experience. According to Bourdieu, popularization and legitimization occur at opposing ends of the field of cultural production. He defines popularization as occurring within large-scale cultural production and where economic considerations are primary. Legitimization, however, for him is characterized by restricted production, where symbolic considerations come first. These two processes take place within all cultural fields.[83]

Bourdieu began to delineate his views on the relationships between legitimacy and popularisation in his study *Photography: A middle-brow art.*[84] In this work he explored photography as a mass leisure pursuit and the ways in which it was consumed as a mass cultural form that could only be understood through the class ethos and habitus by which the practice was mediated. Bourdieu's research showed that working-class photographers were primarily concerned with the realist and functional aspect of photographs. This approach was, for Bourdieu, rooted in working class habitus and constituted a popular aesthetic. Bourdieu contrasted this approach to photography with that of bourgeois photographers for whom photography was a form of art that could be appreciated as a truly aesthetic experience. It was this approach to photography that enjoyed legitimacy over that of working-class practitioners. The bourgeois photographers were keen to distance themselves from "a practice suspected of vulgarity by the very fact of its popularisation,"[85] and did so by making references to their knowledge of fine art to legitimize, and hence differentiate, what was effectively the same actively. According to Bourdieu,

> " … in a given society at a given moment, not all cultural meanings, theatrical presentations, sporting events, recitals of songs, poetry or chamber music, operettas or

[83] Bourdieu, Pierre, The Market for Symbolic Goods, Poetics 14, April 1985
[84] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Photography: A Middle-brow art:* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996
[85] Ibid. P. 74

> operas, are equivalent in dignity and value, and they do not all call for the same approach with the same urgency. In other words, the various systems of expression, from theatre to television, are objectively organized according to a hierarchy independent of individual opinions, which defines 'cultural legitimacy' and its gradations. Faced with meanings situated outside the sphere of legitimate culture, consumers feel they have the right to remain pure consumers and judge freely; on the other hand, within the field of consecrated culture, they feel measured according to objective norms, and forced to adopt a dedicated, ceremonial and ritualized attitude."

Bourdieu, therefore, describes how a creative practice, undertaken in similar ways and with similar methods, could be defined at different ends of a spectrum between the popular and the legitimate and that the ways that this definition was utilised sprang from symbolic distinctions.

The supposed continuum between legitimacy and popularisation remains a key conceptual approach to thinking about the roles of art museums and how they relate to their publics. The perception of Las Vegas as a place that panders to the lowest common denominator in order to attract ever greater numbers of visitors, meant that the Las Vegas art museums were perceived as leaning towards populism and lacking in legitimacy. There was some truth to this. All three Las Vegas art museums hoped to harness the popularity of the city to their institutions and thereby attract considerable numbers of paying attendees. According to Sheldon Adelson, owner of the Venetian, "If you can't bring people to your museum, bring your museum to the people. These museums have plenty of extra art – only about 5% is on show – and Las Vegas will have 40m visitors next year".[86] However, the relationship between these institutions and the city was more complex than a simple wish to popularise art museums. The Las Vegas art museums, in order to operate and be seen as museums, needed to confer legitimacy upon themselves in a city without the signifiers conventionally expected to accomplish this.

[86] The Economist, Hangings in the Wild West: Contemporary Art in America, 4 August 2001

The links between art museums and tourism have become inseparable as tourism destinations increasingly seek to differentiate themselves from others through offering unique cultural attractions, while at the same time art museum rely on tourist visitors for income and international prestige. Tourism encompasses many fields of distinction such as food, culture and even politics, and through this process it can become a field of distinction in its own right. As tourism embodies "a hierarchized system of cultural preferences that are themselves generative of ideas defining patterns of legitimation in culture at large,"[87] distinction generated through cultural capital serves a vital role in the experience of tourism. As status becomes increasingly linked to lifestyle choices, which are often in turn constructed as needing to be 'sophisticated' or 'metropoltian', these choices are becoming increasingly 'omniverous'. As described by Richard Peterson and Roger Kern, a type of 'highbrow' taste has developed which draws selectively from different cultual forms across a broad range of cultural expressions.[88] Thus Lindsay Stringfellow et. al., discussing tastes in food, state that "hierarchies between cultural genres have decreased and been replaced by hierarchy within cultural genres, where food is judged according to 'authenticity' and 'exoticness' which still requires an aesthetic disposition that is brought to bear on a wider variety of foods".[89]

Although this kind of shift from fixed concepts of high and low in cultural capital was not described by Bourdieu, it does not undermine his framework for thinking about distinction. Indeed, the ability to be omnivorous and take pleasure from a range of sources is a form of distinction because it identifies the culturally omnivorous as adventurous and able to distinguish multiple kinds of taste. Omnivorous cultural consumption does not replace the existence of hierarchies but rather changes the signifiers of the hierarchy. In a tourist context this means that

[87] Prior, Nick, A Question of Perception; Bourdieu, Art and the Postmodern, British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 56, Issue, 1, 2005, p. 126
[88] Peterson, Richard and Kern, Roger, Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore, American Sociological Review, Vol 61. No 5, 1996
[89] Stringfellow, Lindsay, Maclaren, Andrew, Mclean, Mairi, O'Gorman, Kevin, Conceptualizing Taste: Food, Culture and Celebrities, Tourism Management, Volume 37, August 2013, p. 80

people might experience a casino and an art museum as part of their holiday and the act of enjoying both, rather than refusing to participate in one or other activity, confers status. Global processes of commodification have progressively meant that art museums have been brought within the realms of consumption and entertainment so that they share conceptual spaces with leisure activities such as shopping malls.[90] However, this process has not meant that casinos and art museums have reached parity in terms of cultural capital. Rather, the increasingly porous nature of lines between popularisation and legitimisation has meant that the signifiers that might once have been recognised to delineate firm divides are now in play by differing types of institution. Indeed, this process was far advanced in Las Vegas at the turn of the 21st Century with the introduction of fine dining, major music stars and art.

Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of habitus, field and cultural capital still provide the most comprehensive framework to understand the sociology of experiences and engagements with art. Furthermore, the actions of museum institutions can be understood by using the same framework. Art museums are utilising knowledge accrued through many years of working with objects and the relationship to other art museum institutions (habitus) and their position, geographically but also within society more broadly (field) to accrue cultural capital. The process becomes further entrenched when utilised within a tourist environment. The necessity for art museums to offer recognisably 'authentic' engagements with works of art demands that they been seen to be authentic institutions. The evolution of audiences which are less dichotomized, that is either cultivated or popular, has meant that the experiences offered to them have in turn become more 'omnivorous' both across a tourist destination and within art museums. The development of the symbolic items that bring distinction, but which cut across more traditional concepts of high and low culture does not in any way contradict Bourdieu's framework as the production of symbolic forms of cultural capital continues.

[90] Prior, Nick, A Question of Perception; Bourdieu, Art and the Postmodern, British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 56, Issue, 1, 2005, p. 126

In an interview with ARTnews Charles Venable pointed out that more Americans like beer than they do Matisse and explained that at Newfields he was trying to "connect the dots between artworks and experiences, between food and scholarship".[91] At its heart, the changes to the Indianapolis institution revolve around money and strategies to put Newfields into better financial shape. More visitors, mean more tickets sold, means more income. However, the criticisms of Venables' approach to this problem frequently accuse the institution of turning its back on scholarship, research and education as well as civic values.[92] These are all signifiers of cultural capital that might be expected to be found at other art museums. Newfields finds itself trying to be both populist through offering entertainment events, while at the same time trying to retain its cultural capital through its exhibitions. It is too early to tell whether Venables' experiment in attempting to offer both experiences and artworks will succeed, or even what success might look like.

The example of Newfields bears some resemblances to that of Charles Wilson Peale's Philadelphia Museum, in that in order to survive they recognised the need to attract an audience and to, albeit in different ways, offer 'rational amusement'. However, the examples in Las Vegas, point to a relationship between the signifiers of cultural capital and the balancing act between popularisation and legitimacy that consciously sought to attract an audience and play a part in the experience economy through offering the most 'authentic' museum experience. In Las Vegas, the art museums sought to become part of the city's leisure experience economy not through offering leisure activities but through attempting to prove their legitimacy as museums. They chose to look, behave and be recognisable as art museums to be regarded as authentic and hence worthwhile sites for visitation. This shift of the relationships of art museums to tourism and leisure is a vital element in contemporary visual culture and the ways in which is it increasingly consumed. In turn this has meant that, while art museums continue to be sites of social

[91] Russeth, Andrew, The Ringmaster! Is Charles Venable Democratizing a Great Art Museum in Indianapolis – or Destroying it? Artnews, 9 July 2019
[92] Ibid.

identification and differentiation moves towards popularisation need not be made at the expense of legitimization, but may be at the expense of innovation as the offer has to be recognisable and pre-packaged. The desire for engagements which are deemed to be authentic, means that art museums will continue to seek legitimizing signifiers although these may now be used to achieve goals of popularity. It is the perceived authenticity of the experience of aesthetic engagement in tourism that makes art institutions relationships to symbolic cultural capital more vital.

4. Authenticity: "From interpretation to experience"[93]

Against the backdrop of the growth of the experience economy, and the increasing absorption of aspects of the leisure industry into museums, the demand for experiences that can be understood as authentic has become a vital part of art museum offerings. Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, the advocates for the experience economy, have identified that for museums "the #1 challenge today is the management of the customer perception of authenticity".[94] Meanwhile Rene Cepeda describes museums as needing to offer "framed experiences rooted in authenticity".[95] The pursuit and assertion of authenticity at art museums is not new and has become such an integral, and rarely questioned, aspect of art museums that it might be tempting to ask, why the Las Vegas art museums would want to do anything else?

An example of a different approach to museums and authenticity can be found at the Expedition Everest roller coaster ride in Walt Disney World Miami. Visitors waiting for the ride pass through a large room called the Yeti Museum. Those that look inside the display cases will find objects purportedly from an expedition to the Himalayas to track down the yeti. By the entrance to the display room is a certificate supposedly showing the doctorate of the leader of the expedition. The Yeti Museum displays objects that allegedly prove the existence of the yeti.

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[93] Foster, Hal, *The Architecture Complex,* London, Verso, p 119
[94] Pine, Joseph and Gilmore, James, Museums and Authenticity, Museums News, May/June 2007
[95] Crepida, Rene, Authenticity in Museums, 9 March 2015: https://ragc.wordpress.com/2015/03/09/authenticity-in-museums/ - accessed 4/ 2017

Nowhere in the museum is there any indication that any of the objects might not be genuine or that the expedition is fictitious, although cynical viewers might find the yeti skulls suspicious.

The display at the Exhibition Everest ride is the embodiment of fears that the cultural sector in the US, and further afield, is slipping into 'Disneyfication'.[96] Easily recognisable signifiers from art museums are co-opted for commercial and entertainment purposes. The presentation of objects with interpretative texts, within display cases and under low light levels, the slightly labyrinthine nature of the room that is perfect for lines of expectant tourists but is also evocative of nineteenth century museums of anthropology or natural history, maps and documents that appear to give the alleged expedition an intellectual basis, all rely on their effectiveness by being reminiscent of traditional art museums. Reproductions are only effective if they are relatable to their source material and the Yeti Museum is knowingly using recognisable signs that visitors are expected to associate with 'museum-ness'.

However, the Yeti Museum is concerned with interpretation only in as much as it supports the pleasurable fantasy that people are not waiting in a long queue to go on a rollercoaster ride but are in fact engaging in an immersive experience that might take them to the Himalayas, if only in their imaginations. The Yeti Museum makes no secret of its fundamental inauthenticity because the types of experiences it is trying to engender do not require authenticity. Indeed, the 'joke' that there is a real yeti and that the proof is displayed at a rollercoaster ride would not work if the display was clearly 'authentic'. The experiential and themed nature of the visit to the rollercoaster is not undermined by the presence of yeti skulls but is rather enhanced. The 'museum' at the Expedition Everest ride is not authentic in the sense that it is seeking to legitimise the experience of engaging with the objects on view through expected museum codes and nor does it claim to be. Rather it is using its relationship to authenticity to create a seemingly consequence-free,

[96] Bryam, Alan, *The Disneyfication of Society*, London, Sage, 2004

populist tourist experience that eschews social purpose in favour of entertainment. This kind of relationship to authenticity is easily found in Las Vegas.

The city of Las Vegas is famous for offering replicas of recognisable locations, experiences, and objects. Pirates and Royal Navy sailors fight naval engagements daily, the sun sets over Venice every hour and Elvis Presley can be present at your wedding. The Luxor Casino is themed around classical Egypt and has been built in the shape of a gigantic pyramid from which a beam of light is shone every night which allegedly can be seen from space. Within the pyramid there was a small display of objects relating to Egypt. These objects were described by the casino as "genuine reproductions" of objects that can be found in museums around the world.[97] The supposed unreality of the city is one of its primary attractions and Vegas is where you go to 'get away from it all' both literally and figuratively. All of these examples of 'genuine reproductions' do not aspire to being 'the real thing' – indeed seeing the real Elvis Presley would be alarming to say the least. The Las Vegas art museums, therefore, need not have taken positions similar to other art museums but could have hijacked recognisable elements to create environments that knowingly eschewed authenticity in ways similar to casinos. However, the art museums in Las Vegas not only exhibited genuine works of art rather than reproductions, they asserted that they were genuine art museums.

Concepts of authenticity relate to things that do not only exist, but also reveal themselves for what they are, while inauthenticity is often perceived as a state of dishonesty, where things are not what they purport to be. Therefore, art museums can be regarded as authentic while casinos can be considered to be inauthentic. Although both are clearly real in the sense that they exist, one is held to represent some form of integrity while the other represents something that is considered to have no integral value. Hence, the surprise at finding art museums in Las Vegas. The ways in which authenticity is articulated in a museum may be different from that in a casino,

[97] Cass, Jeffrey, Egypt on Steroids: Luxor Las Vegas and Postmodern Orientalism*,* Lasansky, D. Medina, McLaren, Brian, eds. *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance and Place,* New York, Berg, 2004

the expectations of tourists as to what experiences they expect in a casino or an art museum are different and the ways in which experiences are understood as authentic by visitors may also differ. Definitions of authenticity, therefore, lie with both the institution that is offering the objects and experiences as well as with those that consume them. The adoption of recognisable codes of 'museum-ness' such as academic interpretation, architecture or curatorial selections, serve to articulate the validity of the experience to visitors (particularly in a city renowned for the unreal) while enabling them to utilise cultural capital to attract visitors.

There is no commonly accepted definition of authenticity in tourist experiences, although it is understood as a subjective and continuously evolving concept.[98] Broadly, ideas of tourist authenticity fall within three different conceptual frameworks. The first, modernist approach, is objective authenticity, where authenticity is manifested in objects that offer genuine experiences, but only if those experiencing them can recognise the codes that signify the authenticity that the experience embodies. Authenticity, in a modernist understanding, is grounded in a distinct basis for deciding on authenticity, although the person experiencing this requires some knowledge of the experience in order to determine its authenticity. The second approach is constructive authenticity. This type of authenticity requires individuals to project their own existing beliefs, preferences or stereotypes. In this approach, authenticity is not a given but is based on societal understandings. The final approach, existential authenticity, relates to a personalised sense of reality that is developed by an individual as part of their attempt to escape the everyday routine of their lives and connect to something they perceive as genuine. This, postmodern, approach to authenticity allows for tourists to understand that what they are experiencing may be constructed specifically for them and therefore may not in fact be authentic, although they experience it as such.[99]

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[98] Macleod, Nikki, Cultural Tourism: Aspects of Authenticity and Commodification, in ed. Smith, Melanie and Robinson, Mike, *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World,* Clevedon, Channel View Publications, 2005

[99] Wang, Ning, Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience, Annals of Tourism Research, Col. 26 No.2, 1999

These three approaches to authenticity in tourism are similar to, but not exactly the same as, Bourdieu's three elements that allow for distinction. Objective authenticity requires that those that experience it understand the signifiers in much the same way as Bourdieu outlines the accrual of cultural capital. Constructive authenticity describes the use of peoples' own understandings of the world around them in a similar way to habitus. Finally, existential authenticity is understood in much the same way as field, in that it describes the ways that this process relates to shared understandings. This suggests that tourist experiences may be made up, not of a single approach to authenticity, but in fact requires all three elements. A degree of objective authenticity in the object or experience, how this relates to the preconceived ideas of the person experiencing it, and how these ideas relate to wider understandings of authenticity and how the concept might be used. Therefore, the ways in which concepts of authenticity are used and for what purposes become more important than debates of the existence, or otherwise, of relative genuineness.

The authenticity of a work of art might be said to be an epistemological distinction because the determination depends on fact – it is either by a certain artist or it is not. The assertion of authenticity is not, however, neutral as it contributes to the definition of value, either cultural or financial. This value is most frequently assigned by experts such as museum curators or art historians. Through defining what an object is, or confirming that it is what it appears to be, art museums, and those who work in them, ensure that objects have value and that this value in turn is reflected on the institution that houses it.[100] Recent debates over whether to attribute a painting of the Salvator Mundi to Leonardo da Vinci have an academic flavour but also financial implications for a painting sold for £450 million. They also have implications in terms of cultural capital for curators and institutions that employ them.[101] In this instance, claims that an object is

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[100] Trilling, Lionel, *Sincerity and Authenticity,* Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1972
[101] Cole, Alison, New Book on Leonardo's Salvator Mundi aims to be a definitive study, The Art Newspaper 16 October 2019

authentic is more than an assertion of its genuine nature, but is part of the process of attaining symbolic cultural capital. Authenticity, and claims for its existence, is not therefore only a question of epistemology, but functions to accrue institutional cultural capital and this in turn contributes to annexing the process of defining authenticity to museums.

Once art museums have claimed the preeminent role in defining the authenticity of the objects within them, they are able to use this position to define the experiences that they offer. Ideals of authenticity, derived from a focus on the authenticity of the objects, have wider implications for the legitimacy of the institutions because the experience of encountering works of art in art museums is also frequently framed by both academics and museum professionals in terms of authenticity. From this perspective, if the objects on view are authentic, the approach to display is deemed authentic and the ways in which they are described are also held to be authentic, then the experience of engaging with the work will also be authentic.[102] As stated by Philippe de Montebello, when director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "…since what we promise is authenticity, that is what our public expects to find within our walls. So, there must never be any question of a reproduction, a simulacrum, taking the place of an original work of art".[103] The gatekeepers for authenticity at art museums are, therefore, the art museums themselves.

In some understandings authenticity cannot be defined except when in contrast to the inauthentic. According to Didier Maleuvre, "authenticity in cultural representation is a mirage in the epigone's mind, a nostalgic illusion of modern consciousness dreaming of a past ideal integration of life and culture, of art and history".[104] For Maleuvre, philosophical claims for the authenticity of the museum itself and the objects they display indicates a yearning both for a past in which authenticity can allegedly be found, and a distrust of the present that is supposedly acting as a barrier to the authentic. Museums are, as described by Maleuvre, institutions that are

[102] Phillips, David, *Exhibiting Authenticity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 1
[103] Cuno, James ed., *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 152
[104] Maleuvre, Didier, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art,* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 18

seeking to reconnect to the past and at the same time attempting to create environments from which unwanted aspects of the present can be barred and, hence, new realities created. Authenticity is a malleable concept which can be used in different ways but can, for Maleuvre, only occur in opposition to supposed inauthenticity in the contemporary world. The creation of so-called new realities and the barring of unwanted aspects of contemporary life are processes that are also underway in casinos. The definition of what is authentic, the experiences within a museum or a casino for instance, and inauthentic, the experiences outside a museum or casino, contribute to understandings of the experience itself.

The art museums in Vegas were certainly spaces that attempted to set themselves apart from the hyper-reality of the city; none more so than the Guggenheim Las Vegas at the Venetian. The Guggenheim Las Vegas was located inside of the Venetian Resort Casino so that to enter the museum, visitors had to first enter the casino. The architecture of the Guggenheim Las Vegas, designed by Rem Koolhaas, defiantly turned away from the architecture of the casino, designed by the Stubbins Associates and Wimberly, Allison, Tong and Goo. For many visitors to the casino, the Guggenheim Hermitage was initially encountered as a solid wall of Cor-Ten steel seen through faux-Renaissance marbled columns. It has been suggested that some visitors to the hotel must have thought that there were building works underway behind the rust coloured wall.[105] Koolhaas deliberately set his building apart from its host and indeed from Las Vegas casino architecture in general. In the context of Las Vegas, the Guggenheim was deliberately contrasting itself with something that was a knowing copy. It declared itself authentic through defiant opposition to something that was perceived of as inauthentic.

Yet the categorisation of what is authentic and what is inauthentic is not always easy for people to define. Italian academic Umberto Eco described an America where publics demand experiences that are not just real, but are 'hyperreal'. Therefore, "The sign aims to be the thing,

[105] Jones, Will, The Clash, World Architecture, January 2002, Issue 102

to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement. Not the image of the thing, but its plaster cast. It's double, in other words".[106] Eco outlines America's relationship to reality where it is possible to experience a reproduction that is in some ways perceived to be better than the real thing and therefore it starts to supersede the 'original'. According to Eco, in a culture preoccupied with authenticity even authenticity becomes a mere sign of itself and indeed, the constant availability of hyperreal experiences has meant that encountering authenticity can be disappointing and might, hence, be considered inauthentic. As Eco points out, the guarantor of authenticity has become the nature of the experience rather than simply the objects themselves.[107] The curation of an authentic visiting experience, therefore, has become as vital a part of museum activities as the curation of the objects themselves. However, this makes the definition of authenticity even more problematic because, while the definition of an object's authenticity might be possible, the process of defining an experience as authentic, or not, rests on the complex relationship between the ways that visitors themselves consider authenticity, how this relates to wider societal appreciations of concepts of authenticity and, also the way that current codes of authentic experience are deliberately managed by museum professionals.

One of the defining features of modern tourism is that it enables people to escape 'reality' and literally and figuratively, 'get away from it all'. The separateness of the tourist experience is created to insulate tourists from the 'real' world and thus offer them experiences that support their preconceptions of place or activity while at the same time separating people from their host environment.[108] For John Urry, the act of tourism and the leisure activities that comprise it are an escape from the quotidian 'normal' world from which those partaking in it wish to flee, albeit for a short space of time and in very distinct ways. Not only do tourists travel to other places and thereby enter into environments that are different from those they have left behind, but once

[106] Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyper-reality,* London, Picador, 1986, p.7
[107] Ibid.
[108] Rothman, Hal, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism and the Twentieth Century American West,* Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1998

they arrive, they wish to engage in activities, to see and experience things that it is not possible for them to do as part of their everyday lives. For Urry it is through the contrast between the everyday and the tourist experience that the importance of the 'tourist gaze' can be discerned.[109] Urry's 'tourist gaze' does not allow for political or sociological readings of what it sees and is instead primarily concerned with engagements only for the purposes of entertainment.

Yet at the same time, tourist experiences need to conform to those that are expected, whether they are genuine or not, so that the experience can be understood as authentic. Tourist sites, therefore, frequently hide the reality of the lives of the indigenous people surrounding them to create spaces for visitors that shield them from unwanted and unexpected encroachments on their idealised tourist experience so that they may gain the maximum pleasure from it.[110] This may take physical form in the creation of enclosed and regulated spaces as is common with Las Vegas casinos, as well as most art museums. However, it may take other forms, such as simply ignoring aspects of the tourist site that do not fit into the tourist ideal. This might include staff working conditions, local politics or the environmental impact of tourist sites on local communities.

This is a process that occurs in art museums, where for instance labour disputes are downplayed, just as in leisure sites. In 2019 the New Museum in Manhattan attempted to prevent staff from joining a union and even hired an anti-union consulting firm to aid them in this process. Although the struggles of staff to unionise were reported in the art press it was not recognised on the museum's website or within the building itself.[111] Indeed, so normalised are museum practices that public recognition of staff disputes in this way might seem strange or at least uncomfortable. The perceived authenticity of the tourist experience cannot be interrupted by people or events which are not part of the 'script'. As noted by Urry, it is the contrast between

[109] Urry, John*, The Tourist Gaze, Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London, Sage Publications, 1990
[110] Rothman, Hal, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism and the Twentieth Century American West,* Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1998
[111] Kenney, Nancy, New Museum and union reach agreement on a contract, The Art Newspaper, 2 October 2019

working, everyday life and the holiday experience that is at the heart of the tourist encounter as tourists demand experiences that are both different and at the same time expected. The experience of visiting an art museum is also often described as being outside of the everyday and therefore somehow authentic.

In ways similar to casinos, although for different purposes, art museums also seek to offer environments which are separate from their surroundings, in which actions are regulated and supervised, and which deliberately do not engage with institutions' operational realities if these conflict with the creation of these conceptually and physically separate spaces, and yet conform to preconceived expectations. Although all of these elements may be different between a casino and an art museum, the ways in which they are used are not different. Indeed, art museums are themed just as casinos are themed. It is the theme, 'museum-ness' in the case of the Las Vegas art museums, that is intended to allow visitors to recognise and define the kinds of experiences that they are having. The Yeti Museum borrows from the codes of museums and uses these codes in a leisure context. The Guggenheim in Las Vegas also used the same codes to attempt to generate a different, and explicitly more 'legitimate' type of experience. A vital part of this process is the requirement that they are seen to be authentic.

Bourdieu's approach to understanding the creation and utilisation of cultural capital at art museums continues to be relevant because he was not only interested in the forms and codes themselves, such as architecture, interpretation or display choices, but he was perhaps even more interested in how they are used. Bourdieu acknowledged that although the ways in which the forms and codes of museums are utilised can differ widely between institutions, these signifiers themselves do not substantially change. This acquisition of institutional isomorphism Bourdieu pointed out, is developed through unconscious mimesis and is impossible to avoid.[112] This means that for new art museums, the influence of already existing, longer established institutions

[112] Sieweke, Jost, Imitation and Processes of Institutionalisation – Insights from Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, 66, January 2014

is impossible to shake off. Furthermore, on an institutional level, greater similarity to other organisations may even be desirable. It is the way in which these codes are articulated that allows for understandings that the institution is in some way an authentic museum.

If, as Bourdieu outlines, taste is a function of fundamental understandings of symbolic codes, then groups who do not have this deep understanding of these codes can only achieve a 'mutilated perception,' because the source of their understanding comes only from practical experience.[113] It is possible to learn the meanings of the symbolic codes but without the more fundamental understanding of the relationships between habitus and field, this constitutes an inauthentic engagement. It is the deliberate learning of these habits which makes them inauthentic. The late acquisition of habits, Bourdieu outlines, is distinguishable from early acquisition through conscious mimesis. Mimesis can be imitation, but it can also indicate the kind of relationship existing between the object that is being copied and the copier. Schwarz, writing about the ways that some groups mimic the habitus of dominant groups, notes that this process reinforces conformity to stereotypes. Thus, the desire to be recognised as authentic, leads to a constraint of actions and, perhaps counterintuitively, leads to a celebration of a process that restricts authenticity rather than one that supports it. Hence, in Las Vegas, the quest for authenticity could only lead to conforming to already existing signifiers.

Through using Bourdieu's concepts of distinction, we can understand how ideas of authenticity can be used to both legitimise and popularise art museums. Bourdieu points out that, with habitus and field, it is not simply the adoption of activities that is important in the creation of cultural capital, but that these activities are seen as deriving naturally from the actor.[114] Therefore it is not enough to wear certain clothes or eat in certain restaurants to gain distinction; these actions must be understood to be in some way 'authentic'. It is this perceived authenticity of the

[113] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on art and literature,* New York: Columbia University Press,1993, p. 219
[114] Ibid.

signifiers that contributes to their having recognisable value. However, authenticity is a symbolic value, and this leads to some practices being recognised as authentic for some actors while being deemed inauthentic for others. "Ascription of inauthenticity classifies people based on neither their ascribed identity alone nor on their actions alone but on the relationship between these two levels and their relation to concepts of authenticity".[115] Authenticity, therefore, is difficult to define and difficult to ascribe because it must be seen to derive naturally, which in turn contributes to symbolic meaning and culture capital, however, it remains a central component of the processes of distinction and of the tourist experience.

Miami, Florida shares Las Vegas's reliance on the tourist industry and worldwide reputation as a holiday destination that offers twenty-four hour eating, drinking and partying opportunities. When Art Basel inaugurated its first Art Basel Miami Beach in 2002 the choice of the city was expressed thus: "Miami is a glamour place, more entertaining than Basel."[116] Although not a byword for post-modern kitsch in the way that Las Vegas is, the city is renowned for its nightclubs, bars and restaurants, beaches and access to water sports. It also shares with Las Vegas a history of organised crime and an aging population of retirees. However, it has also been building a reputation as a city to find contemporary art. The presence of Art Basel Miami, museums of private collections, most notably the Rubell Museum, and city museums such as the Bass Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami and the Perez Art Museum Miami mean that there is a network of legitimizing institutions and expectations in the city that do not exist in Las Vegas.

Previously housed downtown in a post-modern complex designed by Philip Johnson, in 2013 the Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) was moved as part of an effort to create an arts district in Miami. It is now located close to the causeway connecting to Miami Beach and is part of a

[115] Schwarz, Ori, The Symbolic Economy of Authenticity as a form of Symbolic Violence: The Case of Middle-Class ethnic minorities, Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory, 2016, p.2
[116] Posner, Gerald, *Miami Babylon*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2009, p. 335

'cultural cluster' including a waterfront park, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the Wynwood Arts District and the Design District. The 'museum-ness' of the PAMM is expressed through the curatorial focus on art from Latin America, of particular interest given Miami's demographic, the architecture of the building, designed by the Swiss firm of Herzog and de Meuron, which has also designed a number of museums such as Tate Modern in London, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Museum de Kulturen in Basel, and the production of a series of catalogues focusing on Latin American artists, many of whom had not previously been the subjects of English language studies.

As a site intended to attract tourists to the city, the PAMM offers experiences that utilise ideals of authenticity to validate its existence as a part of the Miami leisure offer. Just as with the Las Vegas museums a decade earlier, the PAMM is very much part of the mainstream of art museums. Indeed, there is nothing about the signifiers utilised by the PAMM that would differentiate it from other art museums. Although Miami has a greater support structure for cultural institutions than Las Vegas, its reputation as a tourist destination means that arts institutions in the city need to work hard for legitimacy. The need for legitimacy, at least partly in order to attract visitors, meant that the PAMM displays the expected signifiers found in most other art museums and through doing articulates cultural capital. This institutional isomorphism is developed through knowing mimesis and is utilised directly as part of a cultural tourist offering by presenting expected experiences that conform to preconceived ideals. The performance of the authenticity of the experience is perhaps more important than the authenticity of the objects contained within the museum and might indeed be easier for visitors to recognise. The authenticity of the experience is validated through an understanding of the codes that signal authenticity, through the projection of people's personalised conceptions of what constitutes a museum, and how these relate to the way that people expect their authentic experience to manifest.

The wholesale adoption by the PAMM, and other art museums, of cultural capital signifiers that are commonplace in many other art museums might be explained by asserting that all art museums must share certain attributes that differentiate them from other kinds of institutions and visitors are expected to understand these in order to understand their experiences as authentic. When genuine works of art are displayed in people's houses, in hospitals, malls and airports there is rarely confusion as to whether these places are authentic art museums. The display of genuine works of art may signify that a space, or institution, is like an art museum but that is not, of itself, sufficient to lay claim to being an art museum institution. Not only did Wynn, show his collection in the BGFA but he also showed works by Picasso in a restaurant in the casino. Only one space aspired to be like an art museum. The signifiers of art 'museum-ness' are not only the works of art themselves but can also be read in the institutional utilisation of codes of distinction.

In the instances of the Las Vegas art museums, authenticity was a vital concept, perhaps more so than at other art museum institutions. In a city that was known for popularisation they had to struggle harder than most for legitimacy. The goal of seeking this kind of legitimacy was the attraction of visitors. The codes and forms that were utilised needed to be easily understood as deriving authentically from ideals of the art museum rather than as 'mutilated perceptions'. In Las Vegas, the dominant channels through which this message was articulated were architecture, interpretation and display. If recognition of the signifying codes is an essential part of the process of legitimation, changes to these signifiers undermines the process. Therefore, the structural isomorphism of art museums meant that, in Las Vegas, other forms of authenticity or authentifying processes were difficult to envisage.

5. Las Vegas: Wastelands and Frontiers

If there are challenges to all art museums in the definition of their roles and their relationships with their publics, these were amplified in the context of Las Vegas. The image and, to a large

extent the reality, of Las Vegas is that it is a city that embraces and encourages populist entertainment and commodified tourism. It is not possible for any art museum to exist in isolation of its surroundings and indeed, most art museums emphasise their connections to their locations, be it a city, region or country. Therefore, the influence of both the image and the reality of the city allows for ways to interrogate the polarised ideas of legitimacy and popularisation in the art museum. The influence of the city on the three museums of art meant that they selected and communicated museum signifiers to their publics, namely interpretation, architecture and display, that might aid them in their commercial aims, while at the same time, not engaging with socially directed engagements. The location of these art institutions in a city with such a well-defined image shaped the ways that they developed, and the ways that they navigated the realities of Vegas's primary industry.

The city's devotion to the leisure economy, has made the presence of art, perhaps un-reflexively, seem misplaced. The popular perspective that Las Vegas is unwelcoming to art is delineated by Jonathan Foster who describes it as a 'Stigma City'; a place whose negative image is so strong that it overcomes the lived experiences of the city.[117] For Andrew McClellan, the reputation of the city means that it is a place thought of as "deeply inhospitable to art".[118] Furthermore, in the city itself, so-called 'high culture' is treated suspiciously, so much so that prior to the opening of the Bellagio, when it became known that it would include an art gallery, the Las Vegas media reacted with headlines such as 'Show Me the Monet'[119], and 'Monet-grubber'.[120]

Laurie Hanquinet argues that cities are a "means to provide sensory challenges that would transport people away from the mundane world".[121] For Hanquinet art has become contextual and directly depends on place and she described a distinctly urban cultural capital. There is

[117] Foster, Jonathan, *Stigma Cities,* University of Oklahoma Press, 2018
[118] McClellan, Andrew, *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, p.185
[119] Morrison, Jane Ann, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 16 June 1998
[120] Sebelius, Steve, Las Vegas City Life, 06 April 1997
[121] Hanquinet, Laurie, Place and Cultural Capital; Art Museum Visitors Across Space, Museum and Society, March 2016

increasingly a mix between art and everyday life which promotes aesthetic choices amongst urban inhabitants in a range of areas such as clothes, food and art consumption: "cities are now lived and consumed as resources for cultural capital because our aesthetic relationship to things has profoundly changed".[122] Using Bourdieu's concept of field, for Hanquinet, the physicality of field is now a central part in postmodern appreciations of urban life and decisions as to which field actors wish to operate within can have profound effects on their aesthetic choices, and this in turn has an impact on cultural capital. As urban areas themselves have become symbolic of cultural capital through a combination of stylistic and aesthetic choices, the role of entertainment to promote these spaces and tourism as a means to experience them has become ever greater.

Field is an important part of Bourdieu's concept of the sociology of art appreciation as it attempts to situate actions which are conscious and defined by rules which are fluid and adaptable. Field, as initially described by Bourdieu, is a conceptual space, used to describe groupings such as religion or education. However, as explored in differing ways throughout his career, field can also be a physical space. For the museums in Las Vegas, their relationship to field was important as it acknowledged that their physical location in the city played an important role in determining their relationships to legitimacy and popularization. The relationship between the aesthetization of the city and the ways in which it generated cultural capital for those within it are complex. The ways in which the Las Vegas art museums consciously related to the city and the ways in which they were unconsciously influenced by an institutional isomorphism combined to generate signifiers which were intended to accrue cultural capital in turn which was deployed for both legitimation and popularisation in a tourist context.

The imagined Las Vegas is a place of Elvis impersonators, of kitsch and Liberace, it is 'Lost Wages' and 'Sin City'. It is a place to go to escape the humdrum realities of everyday life. Fictions as varied as *Ocean's Eleven, Viva Las Vegas, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Mars Attacks* and *The*

[122] Ibid., p. 68

Hangover, portray the city as a place of, fairly consequence free, sex, drugs and alcohol. A recent advert on the London Underground for Las Vegas used the strapline "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas". This phrase was coined by advertising agency R&R Partners in 2003 with the specific intention of promoting the city as a provider of leisure activities, perhaps somewhat illicit, that cannot be found elsewhere.[123] The city has actively worked to promote this image of itself in order to attract tourists in search of holiday experiences that they cannot find elsewhere.[124] For most Americans gambling is illegal in their states, while the theatrical entertainments, the restaurants and latterly the nightclubs in Vegas are of a quality not found in the majority of American towns and cities. Las Vegas is a city where the emphasis on the availability of opportunities for entertainment and leisure that are perceived of as being high-quality has become the prevalent view in US popular imagination overtaking the view of Vegas as only full of drunks, gamblers and prostitutes.[125]

Yet, despite the city's attempts to portray itself as outside of the mainstream, its influence, most particularly relating to theming leisure, is felt across the US and beyond.[126] The embrace of recreation, not as an adjunct to contemporary life, but as one of its purposes, as part of the experience economy has now come to be recognised in all areas of US life.[127] According to Heiko Schmid, in the later part of the 20th Century, there has been a transformation of, not just districts but entire cities, towards becoming urban entertainment centres, as the need to create a recognisable image that will attract tourists pushes urban areas and urban leisure businesses to create themes which serve this dual purpose.[128] John Hannigan also identifies the adoption of

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123 Shankman, Samantha, A Brief History of 'What happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas', The Week, 1 October 2003
124 Schmid, Heiko, *Economy of Fascination: Dubai and Las Vegas as Themed Urban Landscapes,* Berlin, Gebruder Borntraeger, 2009
125 Rothman, Hal and Davis, Mike, eds. *The Grit Beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas,* Berkley, Los Angeles & London, University of California Press, 2002
126 Twitchell, James B., *Living it Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002
127 Pine, Joseph and Gilmore, James, *The Experience Economy*, Boston, Harvard Business School, 1999
128 Schmid, Heiko, *Economy of Fascination: Dubai and Las Vegas as Themed Urban Landscapes*, Berlin, Gebruder Borntraeger, 2009

themed fantasy elements in US cities, calling this new urban environment the Fantasy City.[129] For Hannigan, the Fantasy City attempts to convert areas into "glittering protected playgrounds for middle-class consumers,"[130] which exacerbates social problems by privatising space, channelling capital into the hands of corporations or wealthy individuals and creating 'unreal' environments into which 'real' problems simply cannot be allowed to exist.

Due to the emphasis on commodification in the city, Las Vegas has been used as a cypher in discussions of many aspects of US culture. Focusing on this aspect of the city has led commentators such as Jean Baudrillard,[131] Bruce Begout[132] and Robert Hughes[133] to portray it as a 'cultural wasteland' where art cannot compete with the hedonism and commercialism of the city. Art historian Robert Hughes once acidly remarked that, "In Las Vegas 'Art' is more likely to be the name of your limousine driver".[134] For those who see the city as a 'cultural wasteland', Vegas represents the success of kitsch, commercialisation and the lowest common denominator and is read as an experiment that has gone wrong and as a warning to other urban centres.[135] Separating immediate sensations and aesthetic appreciation, in the manner of Clement Greenberg,[136] encourages a reading of the city that places its leisure offerings in opposition to the commonly understood pedagogic goals of the art museum. According to Hughes, writing in 1980, "One cannot imagine public art, let alone a museum, on the Vegas Strip," because, for him culture cannot compete with the extravagance of the casinos. Hence, for Hughes, any display of fine art in the city would be inevitably doomed. [137]

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[129] Hannigan, John, *Fantasy City: Please and Profit in the postmodern metropolis,* London, Routledge, 1998
[130] Ibid. p.7
[131] Baudrillard, Jean, *America,* London, Verso, 2010
[132] Begout, Bruce, *Zeropolis: The Experience of Las Vegas,* London, Reaktion Books, 2002
[133] Hughes, Robert *The Shock of the New,* London Thames and Hudson, 1980
[134] Hangings in the Wild West: Two of America's hottest curators are putting Las Vegas on the cultural map, The Economist, 2 August 2001
[135] Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyper-reality,* London, Picador, 1986, Begout, Bruce, *Zeropolis: The Experience of Las Vegas,* London, Reaktion Books, 2002
[136] Greenberg, Clement, Avant Garde and Kitsch, Horizon, April 1940
[137] Hughes, Robert *The Shock of the New,* London Thames and Hudson, 1980, p. 354

Yet, while the city is seen as a 'cultural wasteland,' its' advocates present it as a representing a 'new frontier' that affords opportunities not found elsewhere in the US. In Las Vegas, architecture is the most visible and most frequently considered manifestation of the city as representing a 'new frontier' where experimental and adventurous approaches generate exciting buildings and environments that are copied across the rest of the US.[138] Reading the city as a 'new frontier', where ideas are generated, was essential to Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour's ground-breaking *Learning from Las Vegas* that interpreted the city as a place that enabled people to believe that they were in an oasis away from the hostility of the quotidian world. For Venturi et. al. the city did not represent all that was bad about architecture but rather, all the elements considered kitsch, commercial or 'pop', were the very elements that made Vegas an example to other cities.[139] In a similar way to Venturi et. al, William Douglas and Paulina Raento also read the architecture of Las Vegas as symbols of a "city of reinvention" where old ideas are put to new purposes.[140] Alan Hess, in his influential book *Viva Las Vegas: After Hours Architecture* agrees: "Today it is more and more difficult to view Las Vegas as an anomaly… These changes have catapulted Las Vegas to the leading edge of American urbanism".[141]

The architectural designs of Las Vegas casinos create protected environments which separate those within them from the 'reality' of the world outside. According to Venturi et al. the city's architecture encourages visitors to enact roles that they cannot while at home. Using Caesar's Palace as an example, they praised the ability of the casino to allow people to act for a few days as though they were centurions.[142] According to Venturi et al, the casinos deliberately contribute

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[138] The Frontier Hypothesis was propounded by historian Frederick Jackson Turner and is sometimes referred to as America's creation myth. He used the concept of the Frontier to account for what he believed to be the particular brand of democracy that characterises America. He first presented his theory to the American Historical Association in 1893. In his presentation he said that the frontier had already closed in 1890.

[139] Venturi, Robert, Scott Brown, Denise, Izenour, Steven, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form,* MIT Press, 1977

[140] Douglas, William and Raento, Paulina, The Tradition of Invention: Conceiving Las Vegas, Annals of Tourism Research, 31:7 -23, 2003

[141] Hess, Alan, *Viva Las Vegas: After-Hours Architecture*, San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1997, p.114

[142] Venturi, Robert, Scott Brown, Denise, Izenour, Steven, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form,* MIT Press, 1977

to feelings of difference and hence freedom from the everyday. As Michael Sorkin puts it, "the careful structure of entertainment and social relations supersedes the routinized contours of everyday life".[143] The meticulously designed casino spaces are created to allow visitors to feel freed from 'normal' life, even when they are not in reality freed. The casinos are some of the most closely monitored places in the US with cameras surveilling every area, while armed security guards and other security personnel are stationed throughout each building with strict instructions to ensure that customers are not too rowdy or obnoxious. Art museums are also designed to create environments that separate those within them from the outside world and which create spaces that are described both as public spaces, enabling community engagement and definition, as well as disciplinary spaces that attempt to force behaviours and modes of thought on those who visit.[144] The cheek by jowl existence of these two types of spaces, albeit for only a brief time, enables us to interrogate the alleged differences, or the potential similarities, between these two types of institution.

There was an assumption that art museums in Las Vegas might sacrifice their traditional legitimizing elements for more entertainment-based approaches in an attempt to appeal to the greatest number of people.[145] Indeed, in the Introduction to the catalogue of the BFGA, Steve Wynn specifically calls it an "attraction",[146] that is a site whose function is to draw in crowds, primarily of tourists. Visitor numbers to Las Vegas have increased steadily year on year. In 1998, when the BGFA opened, over 30 million people visited the city and in 2017 that figure had grown to over 42 million, a record number.[147] The popularity of the city and its appeal to all

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[143] Sorkin, Michael, See You In Disneyland, Sorkin, Michael ed. *Variations on a Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space,* New York: Hill & Wang, 1992, p.242

[144] Duncan, Carol , *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London, Routledge, 1995

[145] For instance, Danto, Arthur, Degas in Vegas, in Danto, Arthur, *The Madonna of the Future,* Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2001

[146] Lumpkin, Libby, ed., *The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art,* Las Vegas, Mirage Resorts Inc., 1998, p. 9

[147] Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority, Historical Las Vegas Visitor Statistics (1970 – 2017), https://assets.simpleviewcms.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/lasvegas/Historical_1970_to_2017_c6545898-1224-48cf-bff5-b08a53ce4369.pdf accessed, 21/6/18

sections of the US population[148] has caused the city to be described as "freakishly democratic".[149] In his book *Air Guitar,* Dave Hickey, celebrates the city as a true reflection of America, one that is, properly, divorced from intellectual pretentions, where class differences are suppressed and which is more democratic than the US electoral process.[150] Hickey's "raw democracy" favours the market over the academy as success in the market indicates greater popularity making it more 'democratic'.[151] For Hickey all economic choices, particularly with regard to the art market, stem from what people really want, as opposed to what someone thinks they need. Ever distrustful of authority, Hickey regards Las Vegas as the ultimate site for individualism. He bundles together Protestant values, academia, politicians and high-culture as forces that supress individuality.[152]

Claims that Las Vegas is an example of a democratic way of life rest on ideas of libertarian personal freedom[153] and Hal Rothman has described the city as "a libertarian desert".[154] It is a city where an electoral tie can be decided by cutting a deck of cards.[155] For Hickey, an appreciation of culture, in his case of art, should be developed through an understanding of popular culture. Throughout *Air Guitar* he describes how his love of pop culture artefacts such as hot rods, guitars, rock music and even drugs, taught him to appreciate contemporary art and conversely how his experiences with academia and authority stunted his enthusiasm. For Hickey everyone can appreciate art without the intervention of the academically trained, which is why he believes Las Vegas to be the perfect place for art museums. Hickey sees access to art, if possible

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[148] Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority, Las Vegas Visitor Profile Study, 2017, https://assets.simpleviewcms.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/lasvegas/2017_Las_Vegas_Visitors_Profile_Study_1__7b2e5a81-585c-48e6-840c-d7b9face9140.pdf , accessed 21/6/18

[149] Andersen, Kurt, Las Vegas USA: Booming with three new mega-hotel-casinos, the city now seems mainstream. But that's only because the rest of America has become a lot more like Vegas, Time, Vol. 143, Issue 2, 1 October 1994

[150] Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, Los Angeles, Art Issues Press, 1997

[151] Crosby, Gregory, High Thoughts in Low Places: Adventures in Raw Democracy with Las Vegas Art Critic Dave Hickey." Scope 25 Jun – 14 July 1998

[152] Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, Los Angeles, Art Issues Press, 1997

[153] Gottdiener, M., Collins, Claudia, C., Dickens, David, R., *Las Vegas: The Social Production of An All-American City,* Massachusetts & Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999

[154] Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century,* New York & London, Routledge, 2003

[155] Takahashi, Paul, NLV council candidates draw cards for spot on general election to ballot, Las Vegas Sun, 21 April 2011

unmediated by traditional academic venues or practices, as of primary importance. Thus, the purpose of the popularisation of arts institutions would be to demystify the experiences of engaging with art and bring it to more people. This process, for Hickey, would not be to delegitimize art museums but would, in fact, do the opposite as it would ensure that they were engaging with 'everyday' people rather than an elite.

The art museums in Las Vegas presented images of themselves that were influenced as much by their location as by aspirations to emulate concepts of the art museum. This fluid relationship at all art museums between an aestheticized urban experience, tourism and leisure and cultural capital is amplified in the Las Vegas context. The city of Las Vegas provides an environment of extremes, in particular around ideas of leisure and authenticity. A significant field in which the art museums in Las Vegas operated and which influenced their development and actions was the city itself and conceptions of the place created by its own image-making. Las Vegas challenges many ideals of contemporary urban life, which has been what has made it a perfect prism for discussions about US society and, in a museum context, for understandings relating to legitimization and popularisation.

6. Methodology and conclusion

This study asks how were the cultural capital signifiers of 'museum-ness' utilised by the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, the Guggenheims in Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Art Museum in their attempts to establish their legitimacy as authentic museums of art within a commercialised tourist setting and what does this tell us about the systems of 'capital' that are in tension within the establishment of art museums in the Las Vegas context. Against polarising debates about the proper functions of art museums that favour either institutional legitimacy or the popularisation of culture, the study asks how did these art museums, located in a city renowned for both recreation and reproduction, use signifiers of cultural capital to achieve their goals.

The development of the academic field of museology was based on understandings that the contemporary art museum can be grasped through exploring its histories. The following case studies will, therefore, use a historically based textual analysis of the surviving traces to reveal the ways in which these three art museums utilised concepts of museum authenticity to legitimise themselves as a way to attract visitors. The investigation of these small short-lived institutions adds another layer to our understandings of art museums through looking at the ways in which they fitted, and did not fit, into concepts of authenticity at art museums. The location of these art museums in Las Vegas, a city that is considered the antithesis of the signifiers that legitimise museum of art and which is dedicated to commercialism, entertainment and reproductions, focuses and frames the claims to legitimacy and authenticity of these institutions.

Finding evidence from sources by looking for connections and making links between events, people and places is key to historical research and indeed much writing about museums. However, historians have recognised that the term 'sources' may be misleading and suggestive of the possibility of finding complete breadths of information. As Peter Burks proposes, the use of the word sources implies "the possibility of an account of the past which is uncontaminated by intermediaries," and therefore, it is better to refer to "traces" instead.[156] Although historians unlike scientists cannot perform tests, it is important that the 'traces' be shared so that the process can be witnessed. The constant focus in Las Vegas on novelty and reinvention means that there is far less focus on preserving the past or heritage than in other cities and the three Las Vegas art museums are in danger of sliding away from memory and already few traces remain. Indeed, although these institutions opened, operated and closed within living memory, they have left few traces of their existences. This is the first academic study that focuses solely on these institutions and as such it has for the first time drawn together a wide variety of material from archival resources, catalogues, the media and photographs, from museum studies as well as from academic studies of Las Vegas, tourism, gambling and architecture and literature.

[156] Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001, p. 13

The language used by a person is indicative of their mind. In the same way the language, symbols, and pictures used by institutions is indicative of their prevailing ideologies. As described by Roland Barthes, content such as newspaper articles, images, and even architecture can be understood as texts, or a set of discursive strategies, that are generated in social, historic and cultural contexts.[157] These 'texts' can be understood as indicators of how realities are constructed and which ideas are accepted as normal. The following case studies will use textual analysis to examine how the language, symbols, objects, images and architectural features adopted in Las Vegas were used as cultural capital. These messages can only exist in relation to the ways that institutions are influenced by wider social structures. In the case of these three institutions, it is their relationships to ideals of museum authenticity that will be the focus of the analysis. The broader structures that influence the messages are embedded in the communication itself and the following case studies will explore the ways that the Las Vegas art museums were like, and unlike, the idealised art museum and ask how these texts attempted to construct authentic reality for audiences.

Cultural capital at art museums takes different forms and may be communicated in different ways. According to Joseph Pine and James Gilmore there are three primary channels of communication utilised by museums; encounters (how aesthetic engagements are interpreted), edifices (how architecture is used to influence behaviours) and artefacts (how the choice of works of art connects to imagined publics).[158] In effect, head space, physical space and shared space. Each of the Las Vegas art museums privileged one of these primary channels and therefore this thesis will explore each of these in turn to fully engage with the ways in which these channels were used to express ideals of authenticity and legitimacy to visitors. Each case study will undertake an in-depth analysis of a single mode of communication so that the signifiers used and the messages expressed can be more fully explored.

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[157] Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies,* London, Harper Collins, 2013
[158] Pine, Joseph and Gilmore, James, Museums and Authenticity, in Museums News, May/June 2007, p.78

Central to textual analysis is the idea that content as 'text' is a coming together of multiple meanings in a specific moment. As this study is interested in the ways that ideas of 'museum-ness' are being created, utilised and defined, as well as communicated, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his development of the idea of cultural capital, will act to underpin the case studies. Bourdieu is not really concerned with the content of art museums beyond how visitors engage with the symbolic cultural capital encountered within. His work seeks to explains why institutions and people adopt behaviours and what they do with these behaviours, in particular the ways in which tastes become sources of power. The work of Bourdieu has dominated studies of the codes of cultural value as well as social distinction. Although interested in the codes used in this process, Bourdieu's work is more engaged with the ways and purposes to which these codes are used.

For Bourdieu cultural capital has similar functions to other forms of capital and serves as an operation of power and authority. Yet the histories of the Las Vegas art museums are not understood as simply attempts to demonstrate or enforce class divisions. As will be seen in the case studies, relationships to economic and social capital were undoubtedly supported by the Las Vegas art museums. However, it is the ways in which these institutions related to concepts of cultural capital that are the primary focus of the case studies. The uses to which cultural capital is put in class division in museums has been the subject of many previous studies.[159] However, in Las Vegas the kind of 'distinction' that the art museums were intended to bring, to casinos as well as the city, was supposed to be enjoyed by a broad range of visitors and inhabitants. Cultural capital was accrued by these institutions through adherence to a museum isomorphism and then used in the service of tourism. As we will see in the following case studies, the Las Vegas museums intended to use their cultural capital to become popular tourist attractions.

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[159] For instance: Fyfe, Gordon., & Ross, M, Decoding the Visitor's Gaze: Rethinking Museum Visiting in Macdonald, Sharon and Fyfe, Gordon, eds, Theorizing Museums, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen, 'Studying Visitors,' in MacDonald, Sharon, ed. A Companion to Museum Studies, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006 and Bennett, Tony, Savage, Mike et. al., *Culture, Class, Distinction*, Routledge, London 2009

Immediately prior to the opening of the Bellagio Casino, Steve Wynn erected a billboard on the Strip proclaiming: "Coming Soon: Van Gogh, Monet, Renoir and Cezanne! With special guests Picasso and Matisse."[160] Once the casino resort opened, the sign was updated to read: "Now appearing, Van Gogh, Monet, Cezanne and Picasso".[161] Although the billboard was interpreted as an amusing piece of advertising[162] it was also the equivalent of an introductory piece of wall text and was undoubtedly a piece of 'the exhibition script'. It knowingly presented the BGFA in the same way as entertainers such as Elton John, Celine Dion or David Copperfield and positioned the gallery as part of the entertainment offerings of the casino. This was the kind of art museum that critics expected in Las Vegas – brash, demonstrative, slightly crass and completely devoted to popularisation.[163] It was true to the ways in which the city is perceived and therefore, could be said to be authentic. However, it was not a signifier of museum authenticity and seemed to presaged an experiential offering that was similar to the dolphins on view at Wynn's other casino, the Mirage.

In stark contrast, and with much less fanfare, when the Las Vegas Art Museum moved to the Sahara West Library it announced that it would continue its "tradition of community service"[164] and that it was intending "to present to its community and to its city visitors, a continuous schedule of ambitious fine-arts exhibitions…".[165] These statements of intent were communicated to the museum's publics through press releases and mission statements, both of which are expected channels of communication for art museums. The LVAM's communications affirmed that it would conform to ideals of the goals and functions of museums and in so doing aligned it with traditional art museums. Continuing a tradition of community service is similar to the

[160] Hughes, Robert, Las Vegas – Over the Top: Wynn Win?, Time Magazine, 26 October 1998
[161] Danto, Arthur C., *The Madonna of the Future,* New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000, p. 352
[162] Danto, Arthur, Degas in Vegas, Danto, Arthur, *The Madonna of the Future,* Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2001
[163] Stewart, Anna, King of Las Vegas bets £1bn in luxury stakes: Hotel aims to lure wealthy, The Mail on Sunday, 22 February 1998
[164] Press Release, 14 February 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[165] Mann, James, Las Vegas Art Museum, Mission Statement, 1997, University of Nevada archives

assertion that the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was working for the benefit of "the inhabitants of New York".[166]

These two public statements of intent epitomise the polarising positions between those who are anxious about and defensive of traditional museum practices and those who want museums to radically change to attract a new and more diverse audience.[167] The process whereby one notion of the correct actions and communications of museums is legitimate, while the other betrays an overemphasis on popular forms that undermines museums' true goals, rests on ideals of what constitutes an authentic art museum. These ideals largely derive from understandings of major, long-standing art museums and do not always take into account the experiences of smaller institutions. Pervasive institutional isomorphism in the museum sector encourages institutions to behave in similar ways, consciously and unconsciously mimicking ideals of correct behaviour so as to accrue legitimacy. Yet, in Las Vegas, this dichotomy does not adequately explain the ways in which the three art museums articulated their authenticity and the uses to which this was put.

The billboard at the BGFA fitted stereotypes of casino behaviour, while the LVAM conformed more to expected art museum behaviours. Against such polarised positions, this thesis proposes that it is the concept of authenticity, and in particular ideals about an authenticity of experience, that are utilised to demonstrate the separation between different kinds of leisure activity. While the authenticity of a work of art might be demonstrable, or at least negotiable, the authenticity of an experience requires a complex matrix between a commonly recognised objective authenticity, a personal understanding of what might constitute authenticity, and an existential understanding of reality determined by wider understandings of society. At this remove it is no longer possible to discover how visitors understood the authenticity of these art museum institutions, nor how they related this understanding to society. However, it is possible, through examining the extant

[166] Hibbert, Howard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,* London, Faber and Faber, 1980
[167] Witcomb, Andrea, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum,* London, Routledge, 2003

traces left behind by the three art museums, to explore how the institutions understood, and communicated, their hoped-for authenticity.

While each museum of art utilised interpretation, architecture and display choices to communicate to their publics, each of the case studies will focus on one of the primary channels of communication at each institution. This is so that each channel can be discussed and explored more fully, but also because each institution privileged one mode of communication over the others. At the BGFA we will focus on the interpretation of aesthetic encounters, the Guggenheim Las Vegas on the role of architecture in defining the institution, and at the LVAM the ways that curatorial display choices were intended to speak to imagined publics.

The catalogue at the original BGFA was used as a tool to convey Wynn and the Bellagio's messages about his gallery and the intended aesthetic encounters. As with many exhibitions it is not possible to recreate the experience of visiting. The most significant trace left behind of its existence is its catalogue, produced to commemorate the collection and serve as a memento for tourists and was available in the gift shop at the end of the visit. The catalogue was given to journalists and therefore influenced the ways in which the gallery was reported in the media. However, it was not simply a marketing tool, although it was used for this purpose. It acted as a manifesto for the BGFA and it set out Wynn's vision for how it would operate in the casino context and attempted to define the experience of visiting his gallery. The production of a catalogue for the BGFA, edited by a nationally respected curator, and containing essays by professors, academics, curators and art critics, made a play for situating the BGFA within the national, and international, mainstream of art museums. Through extensive media engagement, Wynn, a consummate showman, presented his vision for the BGFA. The catalogue, however, not only supported this but also provided a guarantee of the authenticity of the gallery, the paintings and the aesthetic experience of engaging with them. The primary material for this first

chapter will be the collection catalogue. This will be supplemented with extensive media reports from international, national and local sources.

Chapter 1 explores how the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art used academic interpretation to assert the authenticity of the works in the collection and hence the authenticity of the experience of viewing them. The BGFA was intended to be an attraction and to play a part in the luxury theme of the casino, therefore, rather than offer an ersatz museum, the authenticity of the gallery was an essential component in this process. The accrual of cultural capital by the casino, through the creation of a genuine art museum, was only possible through the adoption and deployment of widely understood museum signifiers. The luxury nature of the casino's theme could only be confirmed through the provision of an art museum experience that was intended to be perceived as genuine. Through conforming to expectations of 'museum-ness', it was able to function as an attraction for visitors to the casino. Chapter 1 will examine how this approach became blended into a packaged and consumable tourist experience that could support the luxury image of the Bellagio casino.

Once the Guggenheim Las Vegas had opened, the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Thomas Krens admitted that it was the opportunity to undertake a significant architectural project that had ensured the Guggenheim's presence in Las Vegas.[168] The second case study will, therefore, concentrate on the legitimising messages of the architecture of the Guggenheim spaces. It will use archival material from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York relating to their excursion in Las Vegas. This material consists largely of press releases and other documents prepared for public release and was particularly focused on the architecture of the new galleries. The Guggenheim spaces have been completely remodelled since the art museum left the city and no physical traces remain. Photographs and images of the spaces from the architects OMA, the Guggenheim Foundation and other sources have been

[168] Farquharson, Alex ed., *The Magic Hour – The Convergence of Art and Las Vegas*, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 2001, p. 102

used to 'reconstruct' the museum. As with the BGFA chapter, press reports, particularly from the architectural press, have also been used.

Chapter 2 will explore the how the architecture of the Guggenheims in Las Vegas was utilised to establish the authenticity of the institution and of the visiting experience. The built environment that surrounds the works on view not only frames the experiences of the visitor but seeks to influence their behaviours, and has become a substantial feature of contemporary museums. The structures of museums have come to be considered almost as sculptural objects in their own right and as being worthy of admiration in the same way as the contents.[169] The authenticity of the experience is highly influenced by the intended authenticity of the environment in which the objects are shown, which in turn leads to supposedly appropriate behaviours. The archival material at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation shows that the statements made by the architecture of the Guggenheim Las Vegas was intended to be the institution's defining feature. Without a permanent collection, and showing exhibitions that had previously been shown in other Guggenheims, Koolhaas's architecture was the only truly original aspect of the Guggenheim Las Vegas. Chapter 2 will show how the architecture of the Guggenheim sought to demonstrate its originality, against the inauthenticity of the Venetian casino, and encourage behaviours that are commonly expected in art museums around the world. At the Venetian, the authenticity of the art museum was dependent on understandings of the casino as inauthentic. However, this case study will ask which institution, the art museum or the casino, could best lay claim to authenticity in the Las Vegas context.

The archive for the Las Vegas Art Museum is held in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. A very fruitful correspondence with their librarian led to the arrival by post of a large bundle of copies of documents spanning the history of the LVAM. Some of these documents, in particular the earliest ones, are minutes of board meetings. Most, in a way similar to the Guggenheim, were

[169] Foster, Hal, *The Art-Architecture Complex,* London, Verso, 2013

documents intended for public release, including exhibition material written by LVAM curators. The chapter will also interrogate catalogues and other interpretive document produced by LVAM curators to explore their intentions and aspirations for the art that they chose to exhibit. More so than the other art museums, the LVAM was the 'local' museum and was intended to have a community function. This chapter will therefore also look at the history, demographics and politics of the city to place the LVAM within this local context.

Chapter 3 will focus on the oldest art museum in Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Art Museum, and explore how the choice of works to display supported its aspiration to become a nationally important institution and hence the ways in which the art museum addressed its publics. The art museum's move to the Sahara West Library in 1997 began a period of intense activity which saw the LVAM attempt to attract attention from across the US. The history of the LVAM, and its relocation into a library built specifically to generate community bonds in a city that is supposed to have no community, meant that it was the 'local' arts institution for the inhabitants of the city. Unlike the BGFA and the Guggenheim, the LVAM was founded with intentions to serve a local community. Community engagement has become an expected feature for art museums. This chapter will explore how the LVAM's relationship to community engagement was manifest in the display decisions made by its curators, in particular James Mann and Dave Hickey. It will ask who its imagined publics were and how it sought to show its authentic nature through its relationship with them. It will also ask how this form of museum authenticity was used by the LVAM. The ambiguities of the language used at the LVAM around its imagined publics obfuscated the art museum's relationship to tourism as it attempted to be both a legitimate community arts institution and a lightning rod for national cultural tourism.

While, the city of Las Vegas is described as a place where social and cultural experiments are constantly taking place, this thesis does not suggest that the histories of these three institutions provide solutions to the problems that face contemporary museums. Rather, it proposes that the

often binary perspectives on museum functions are in fact more complex and behind the polarisation between legitimacy and popularisation is a pervasive museum isomorphism that has developed out of the early history of museums. This provides a framework for understanding how museums derive legitimacy but also serves to exclude much other activity. Furthermore, this process of mimesis acts to stunt change or growth which might produce functions that fall outside of 'mainstream' expectations. This is not to suggest that the Las Vegas institutions were in any way trailblazers, clearing a route that can be followed by other institutions. The opposite is in fact the case and they were institutions that sought to be seen as part of the tradition of art museums. This thesis, however, asks which elements and values were utilised and adapted by them and for what purposes, while at the same time asking how different these signifiers were from those of the casinos that surrounded them. Through an analysis of these institutions as cultural objects in their own rights, it is possible to critically interrogate how they used codes and forms to communicate authenticity as authentic art museums.

Chapter 1

"Nicer here than in the real world": Experiencing the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art

Fig. 1 The Bellagio Hotel-Casino-Resort.

1. Introduction: And so it begins[1]

When the Bellagio Hotel Resort Casino in Las Vegas (Fig. 1) opened in 1998 it included an art museum, the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art (BGFA). The BGFA was unashamedly a tourist attraction, intended to draw people into the Bellagio either as guests or as visitors. Steve Wynn, the owner and driving force behind the casino and the art gallery, intended to place the Bellagio ahead of its rivals by offering unparalleled levels of service, design and entertainment and the art museum was envisioned to play a role in supporting this. In the catalogue for the collection

[1] This was the slogan for a series of TV adverts aired prior to the opening of the Bellagio and it also appeared on the invitations for the opening night

Wynn called the art museum an "attraction," that is a site whose function is to draw in tourists. The art gallery was only one of a number of attractions at the Bellagio that also included fine dining, circus shows and luxury shops, all of which contributed to a commercialised, experiential, tourist offering. As Wynn explained in a TV interview, the focus of the BGFA was on tourists and in particular tourists who visited the Bellagio.[2] The presence of paintings was described by Wynn and the Bellagio in primarily experiential terms and was intended to show, as Wynn explained, that "we intend to stimulate you on all levels".[3] Yet, despite its populist purpose and setting, the BGFA strove for legitimacy and utilised symbolic cultural capital, to achieve its goals.

Wynn's art museum proved to be extremely popular and there is anecdotal evidence that it was visited by many people who had not previously visited a museum of art. In the nineteen months in which it was open and showing Wynn's collection, 630,000 people visited, averaging 33,000 people every month.[4] When the BGFA opened, media reports highlighted the opportunity it gave people from across the United States to see art, some for the first time. It was reported that Wynn "likes the idea that fat people from Iowa can enjoy it (Van Gogh's Peasant Woman Against a Background of Wheat) for just $10 admission,"[5] and that, "people who've never looked at art before (one woman in the gallery asked me who Renoir was) are discovering a new pleasure in Cezanne, which can't be a bad thing".[6] The BGFA was hailed as a success even if, "like many of the people who file through the gallery straight from the casino – you've never seen an Old Master or an Impressionist work before in your life".[7] Alan Feldman, a spokesman for Wynn, was quoted as saying, "So the general public may not immediately recognise a Monet from a Manet, but they are as moved and touched by the paintings as anybody".[8] The BGFA was

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[2] Steve Wynn interview with Charlie Rose for Sixty Minutes, quoted in Binkley, Christina, *Winner Takes All: Steve Wynn, Kirk Kerkorian, Gary Loveman, and the Race to Own Las Vegas, Hyperion,* New York, 2008, p.85
[3] Ibid., p.85
[4] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas ,University of Nevada Press, 2005, p.24
[5] Garfield, Simon, How Las Vegas Got the Culture Bug, The Mail on Sunday, 15 November 1998
[6] Kimmelman, Michael, In an Unreal City, Real Masterworks Beat the Odds, The New York Times, 6 December 1998
[7] Biggs, Melissa, Wynn's Showplace, Town and Country, 1 April 1999
[8] Stewart, Anna, King of Vegas bets £1bn in luxury stakes, The Daily Mail, 22 February 1998

positioned, therefore, as a tourist attraction that, like the other attractions at the casino, offered an experience that was intended to be enjoyed by a wide demographic.

The concept of opening an art museum in the Bellagio began with an idea of Steve Wynn's that a casino that aspired to opulence and sophistication needed fine art at its centre. Initially Wynn had wanted to buy a painting by Caravaggio or Titian, both Italian artists to go with the Italianate theme of the casino and put it behind the front reception desk.[9] From the earliest concept it was intended that art would function to support the commercial goals of the resort. Wynn began looking for suitable works of art in mid-1996 and very soon moved from the original idea to acquiring works from the 19th and 20th Centuries. He spent prodigiously on art and was often reported attending auctions at Christie's and Sotheby's in New York.[10] As the casino-resort neared completion Wynn hired a curator, art historian Libby Lumpkin, to help oversee presenting the collection to the public in the form of an art museum. By the time the art museum opened there were over 30 works on display by artists such as Manet, Monet, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, Jasper Johns, Warhol, Jackson Pollock and Miro.

The location of the BGFA misled many observers into expecting that it would offer populist aesthetic pluralism or a postmodern relativism, where experiences, whether at a restaurant, a circus show or an art museum, would be considered equivalent. As one disbelieving reporter remarked: "Visiting a casino for its fine art sounds as loopy as joining a frat for its rare books."[11] The BGFA was described as a "preposterous venture,"[12] as "something foreign to Las Vegas,"[13] and as a "gimmick".[14] Robert Hughes, no fan of Las Vegas, remarked that, "the whole Bellagio experience is so bizarre that it's almost enough to make you want to spend a weekend there".[15]

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[9] Millard, Rosie, A big Wynn in Vegas, The Daily Telegraph, 13 August 1999
[10] Binkley, Christina, *Winner Takes All: Steve Wynn, Kirk Kerkorian, Gary Loveman, and the Race to Own Las Vegas,* Hyperion, New York, 2008, p.87
[11] Segal, David, With Loopy Bellagio, Vegas Raises the Stakes – and the Tab, The Washington Post, 2 May 1999
[12] Stephens, Philip, Real is fake and fake is real, The Financial Times, 3 April 1999
[13] Kimmelman, Michael The New York Times, 6 December 1998
[14] Segal, David, The Washington Post, 2 May 1999
[15] How Las Vegas Got the Culture Bug, The Daily Mail, 15 November 1998

However, the importance of authenticity, both of the paintings and of the institution, was recognised by many of the journalists and art critics that visited the BGFA, although sometimes in surprise. For instance, the Washington Post reported that at the BGFA you could appreciate "honest-to-God masterpieces," once you had accepted "the strangeness of the venue".[16]

The surprise of the BGFA was not that it was as good as the 'real thing' but that it was the real thing. For example, art critic, Arthur Danto expressed amazement at the 'reality' of the art museum: "one does not expect to encounter Reality as such, where things are what they are and not what they merely look like".[17] Danto was referring to the authenticity of the works on view and the expectation in Las Vegas that everything is a copy. The reputation of the city for kitsch and populist entertainments made it seem even more likely that the BGFA would be little more than a poor facsimile of an art museum.

As Danto points out, for many the 'reality' of the engagement with works of art is based on questions of their authenticity. When he visited the BGFA he was asked by his guide, "if I thought the paintings were real. That, she said was what 'folks out here really want to know'".[18] The reality of the works on view was called into question because of the city's, and in particular the casino's, reputation for unreality. The surprise, however, was not only that the works on view were what they purported to be, but that despite the seeming incongruity of an art museum in Las Vegas, they were presented in a manner that was intended to engender authentic emotional responses. It was not just that the Jackson Pollock on view was authentic, but that the ways in which viewers encountered it were presented as also genuine. Although Wynn also displayed works by Picasso in a restaurant in the casino, it was never presented as anything other than a restaurant. However, the BGFA offered the possibility for a type of experience that was recognisable as authentically of the art museum by the use of codes adopted from other art

[16] Segal, David, With Loopy Bellagio, Vegas Raises the Stakes – and the Tab, The Washington Post, 2 May 1999
[17] Danto, Arthur C., *The Madonna of the Future,* New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000, p.352
[18] Danto, Arthur, Degas in Vegas, The Nation, 1 March 1998

museums and communicated through the interpretation of the collection, primarily in the catalogue.

This chapter explores how, perhaps counter-intuitively, the BGFA utilised ideals of authenticity derived from the authenticity of the works in the collection, as well as from understandings of the art museum institution, together with a modernist aesthetic approach to art appreciation, to validate the experience of visiting, and in combination with concepts of experience tourism, create a luxury brand. It will look at how interpretation of the works in the collection, primarily through its catalogue, was marshalled to assert the authenticity of the works of art, of the institution and ultimately of the visit itself. Through defining the engagement with the collection as a particular type of experience the Gallery conformed to mainstream museum definitions of aesthetic encounters. Yet, as pointed out by Pierre Bourdieu, the focus on this kind of universalist ideal of aesthetic experience masks the true actions of museums. We will see how, behind the rhetoric of providing special experiences, the BGFA was intended as part of a commercial enterprise.

In this case study the dichotomy between popularisation and legitimization, or low and high as it is often framed,[19] will be interrogated. The BGFA, located in a casino and used as a tourist attraction, did not completely jettison expected legitimising functions of art museums, most importantly the modernist notion of disinterested engagements. Rather it was this very aspect that was presented as a feature in its attempts to attract a broad audience. This approach to aesthetic experiences was then folded into a packaged and consumable tourist offering that emphasised the necessity for a disconnect between tourist experiences and the quotidian world – encouraging people to 'get away from it all'. It achieved populist goals through becoming an authentic art museum rather than a replica of one and it demonstrated its authentic credentials through the ways it interpreting the experience of visiting as an authentic and personal aesthetic

[19] Witcomb, Andrea, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum,* London, Routledge, 2003

engagement with art. Moreover, rather than being anomalous, this type of disinterested aesthetic engagement with works of art promoted by the BGFA was in line with mainstream art museum understandings of the ways in which visitors should engage with works of art. The example of the BGFA shows that claims for legitimacy can be used for populist ends.

The interpretation offered by the BGFA through the catalogue for the collection will be the primary resource for this chapter. The catalogue acted as a manifesto for the ways that the gallery wanted its publics to understand their visits and the BGFA itself. The physical nature of the catalogue as well as the language used will be analysed as a text to reveal how understandings of the gallery were communicated and the purposes behind the discursive strategies employed. The catalogue not only conveyed the intentions of Wynn, its owner and founder, but was also a piece of marketing and was distributed to the press. Its contents therefore, were used as source material for many media reports on the Gallery and therefore influenced understandings of the gallery even before visits. The interpretation of the works in the collection was used to present the encounter with art as an experience that was authentically of the art museum. The evidence from the catalogue will be put into context by media reports and the experiences of journalists and art historians who visited. Pierre Bourdieu's engagement with Immanuel Kant's ideals of disinterested and universal aesthetic engagements will be underpin the analysis of the catalogue.

The first section of this chapter will look at the ways in which interpretation, and catalogues in particular, are used in museums to define and influence the ways that people think about the works of art that they are seeing and the experience of visiting. The next section will analyse the physical nature of the catalogue, explore the way in which it was organised and compare this to other catalogues. The ways in which the essays in the catalogue described and explained the works in the collection will then be examined in relation to Kantian and Greenbergian concepts of disinterested engagements with works of art. We will then look at how these ideals were

connected to ideals of tourism at the BGFA. Finally, the financial realities of the BGFA, ignored in the interpretation of the collection, will be discussed.

2. Catalogues and authenticity

The Wynn collection was memorialised in a catalogue that was available in the gallery's gift shop. It was described dismissively as "the most lavish catalogue ever produced for so modest a collection," and press reports identified it being as a savvy marketing tool for the casino.[20] However, it was not just a PR stunt or a vanity project for Wynn but was also a key tool in setting the tone for how visitors understood the experience of visiting, both while in the museum and afterwards. On entry, visitors were given a flyer, giving a brief description of the collection and explicitly encouraging them to buy the catalogue. The catalogue was identified as forming the foundation for the gallery's interpretation. According to one report, the catalogue provided, "a fully illustrated and often brilliant essay by a distinguished art historian," for each painting which was the basis for the audio guide narrated by Wynn himself.[21] It was reported that half of all visitors purchased the audio guide.[22] The intention of the catalogue to direct visitor experiences is explicitly stated in the first sentence of the Editor's Note, when collection curator Lumpkin, notes that, "This book of essays was assembled with a single thought in mind: to enrich the public's experience of visiting".[23] The catalogue, therefore, set out the intentions of Wynn and others at the Bellagio for the gallery and formed the basis for other interpretive communications as well as becoming part of press and media reports. It provided interpretation of the works that addressed questions as to the authenticity of the collection and of how to encounter these works in a casino setting and was intended to influence all visitors.

[20] Rosenthal, Tom Picasso Plays Las Vegas, The Daily Telegraph, 28 June 1998
[21] Ibid.
[22] Kimmelman, The New York Times, 6 December 1998
[23] Lumpkin, Libby, ed., *The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art,* Las Vegas, Mirage Resorts Inc., 1998, p. 246 (afterwards Lumpkin), p. 11

The catalogue was given to journalist and formed part of their reports on the gallery, hence acting to inform the experiences of visitors ahead of their visit, whether they purchased a copy or not. Gary Thompson's piece for the Las Vegas Sun exalting the BGFA, quotes extensively from the catalogue,[24] as does Arthur Danto in the Nation, while Michael Kimmelman in the New York Times recounts how he had "thumbed through the collection catalogue," and calls it a remarkably good document.[25] Danto assures his readers that the catalogue shows that "everything is deeply authenticated, to settle the question of reality certain to arise in the context."[26] For him the catalogue guaranteed for visitors that the paintings that they are looking at are 'the real thing' through its academic approach and the calibre of the contributors.

Creating a catalogue for any collection, regardless of its size, composition or location, is a time-consuming task. That it is undertaken at all means that the collection is regarded as important, at least by those that are involved with it, and that the items within it, its constituent parts, are deemed to be not only important as individual objects but as a group. Engagement with a catalogue, therefore, allows for an examination of the semiotic choices made by the contributors and enables an exploration of how its authors attempted to encourage readers to place the art works into a broader framework of interpretation and discourse, as "once one of these frameworks is activated, they…. shape how we are encouraged to think about events".[27] The interpretations contained in a catalogue do not simply mirror the reality of an exhibition but also attempt to define the reality of the experience of the exhibition.[28] Words, grammar and images in catalogues are utilised to interpret the underlying discourses and ideologies around the expected engagements with the works on view. Interpretative efforts at museums are, therefore, not neutral and the ways in which art museums interpret the works on view contributes to the ways

[24] Thompson, Gary, Bellagio's art collection is a treasure for Nevada, The Las Vegas Sun, 26 August, 1999
[25] Kimmelman, Michael, In an Unreal City, Real Masterworks Beat the Odds, The New York Times, 6 December 1998
[26] Danto, Arthur, Degas in Vegas, The Nation, 1 March 1998
[27] Machin, David & Mayr, Andrea, *How to do Critical Discourse: A Multimodal Introduction,* London, Sage Publications, 2012, p. 20
[28] Fairclough, Norman and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse as Social Interaction,* London, Sage, 1997

in which the institution seeks to influence the types of engagements that visitors have with the works.

Throughout most of their history, art museums have largely offered little in the way of interpretation beyond allowing the works of art to speak for themselves, as it was feared that the use of words and texts would threaten to overcome the information available from the works alone. Although there were innovations such as the chronological hang at the Louvre in 1801,[29] or the provision of printed handbooks at the National Gallery from 1832,[30] which were intended to contribute to visitors' understandings of the paintings on view, for the uninitiated much of either collection must have remained confusing. However, the use of written texts, directed at the museum going public rather than at academics, has now become a commonplace, as art museums have attempted to provide visitors with in-depth contextual and interpretative information.

The use of instructive panels, wall labels, contextual displays and printed texts such as catalogues and leaflets have become increasingly used to produce 'exhibition scripts' which are aimed at helping, enhancing or directing visitors' engagements with works of art.[31] This process is further enhanced through the availability of art museums' websites and apps. The utilisation of interpretation methods moreover, continues to be largely understood to be part of the pedagogic strategy of museums, with outcomes frequently understood as part of an educational mission and, through the provision of information, as part of attempts to enhance the aesthetic experience rather than distracting from it.[32] Exhibition interpretation, therefore, is part of a strategy intended to influence the ways in which visitors engage with the works of art through providing them with the intellectual tools to do so.

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[29] McClellan, Andrew, The Musee de Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror, The Art Bulletin, Vol. 70., No. 2, 1988
[30] Gordon, Dillian, *The Italian Paintings Before 1400,* London, The National Gallery Company Ltd., 2011, p. vii
[31] Rice, Danielle, Balancing Act: Education and the Competing Impulses of Museum Work, Art Institute of Chicago Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2003
[32] Staiff, Russell, *Re-imagining Heritage Interpretation: Enchanting the Past-Future,* London, Routledge, 2017

It is art museums' desire to be increasingly more egalitarian and accessible that has led to the explorations of more channels of interpretation in order to encourage broader engagements.[33] There are, however, tensions between aspirations to encourage accessibility and an authoritative rendering of judgements about interpretation. As such, interpretive texts have been described as "the single, disembodied voice of the museum," that posits visitors as passive receivers of information.[34] As few textual interpretations allow for audience participation, or the articulation of alternative readings, they can become forms of didactic instruction that threaten to overwhelm personal aesthetic engagement.

As interpretation is neither objective nor accidental, but is a socially constructed cultural practice, the urge to offer accessible ways to engage with works of art can become mired in concepts of 'correct' or 'valid' approaches which preclude other forms of engagement or understanding. Hence, Lynn Maranda, observes that "cultural attributes, which might differ from the norm, rarely enter into the equation" of museum interpretation.[35] Paradoxically, it is through the very process of seeking to use the knowledge and experience that rests within art museum institutions to unlock meanings and enable greater enjoyment of works of art, that institutions run the risk of further entrenching their authority and closing down debates from outside their walls.

Exhibition catalogues, therefore, play a crucial role in the process of expressing the ways in which museums wish visitors to engage with and think about the works on view. They contribute to determining which themes or which discourses are presented to visitors and offer interpretations not only for individual works but for exhibitions as a whole. However, catalogues are "an ambivalent phenomenon,"[36] because they reinforce the authenticity of art museums by presenting them as vital sites in the realm of visual culture, while at the same time presenting

[33] Carr, David, Reading Beyond the Museum, The Journal of Museum Education, Vol. 29, No. 1 2004
[34] Nashashibi, Salwa Mikdadi, Visitor Voices in Art Museums, The Journal of Museum Education, Vol. 28, No.3, 2003, p. 21
[35] Maranda, Lynn, The Voice of the Other: Breaking with Museum Tradition, Complutum, Vol. 26, 2015, p. 60
[36] Ursprung, Philip, The Indispensable Catalogue, Anyone, No. 20, 2010, p. 102

them as spaces that appear to allow and encourage independent debate and critical thought. Catalogues, according to Philip Ursprung, have "the aura of a disinterested platform," because they present themselves as a channel of communication "that adheres to the rules of scientific discovery," through enabling discussions within academia.[37] However, at the same time, this impression of museum interpretation can serve to close down critical debates outside of academia. Although Ursprung's use of the word disinterested is not explicitly linked to modernist aesthetic understandings of the word, for him the authenticity that is generated from museums of art through the production of exhibition catalogues, comes from their being seen as disengaged from social, political or economic factors and through a supposedly 'neutral' academic engagement with works of art alone.

Exhibition catalogues are rarely expected to be party political, and while they may have social agendas, such as for instance a re-evaluation of LGBTQ+ artists, they do so largely through the presentation of their texts as being academic rather than polemic. In this way catalogues perform a dual function of validating art museums through seeming to promote discussion, albeit in an academic environment, while at the same time presenting themselves as offering an academically accurate voice. The concept of neutral academic excellence allows for thinking about exhibition catalogues that makes it is possible to declare that they are "where art history is made".[38] Their supposedly disinterested academic approach stems from being, as described by Beatrice Joyeux-Prunel and Olivier Marcel, books that describe or show evidence of an historical event, both of the extant artefacts displayed in the exhibition, and as witnesses to the exhibition itself.[39] It is the supposedly academic nature of catalogues that not only makes them authentic but helps to confer authenticity on the objects that they discuss.

[37] Ibid. p. 103
[38] Graham, Beryl and Cook, Sarah, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2010, p.190
[39] Joyeaux-Prunel, Beatrice and Marcel, Olivier, Exhibition Catalogues in the Globalization of Art: A Source for Social and Spatial History, Artl@s Bulletin 4, No. 2, 2016

The production of an exhibition catalogue is a form of public address. As described by Umberto Eco, writing in reference to narrative literature, every text always implies a set of rules that are created by the author and activated by the reader. According to Eco,

> "To make his text communicable, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (Model Reader), supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them".[40]

Whether consciously or unconsciously every text, therefore, imagines its potential reader. The 'Model Reader' is imagined and addressed in the text so that the 'real' reader can be encouraged by the writer to understand, accept and enter into the text. The more that the Model Reader and the real reader overlap the more successful the text will be.

As explored by Kurt Iveson, the mode of address imagines its publics, but does not create them if they do not already exist.[41] Writers of exhibition catalogues therefore, might imagine readers as those with knowledge of and interest in art or the subject that they are dealing with. The content of the text, although produced for the purposes of making an exhibition more explicable to more people, is not, and perhaps cannot be, universal. Assumptions are made about the potential recipients of this form of public address which inadvertently will exclude some groups of visitors. Amy Karlinsky, for instance, points out that catalogues produced by Canadian museums for exhibitions of Inuit art are most frequently produced for an audience who have an interest in Inuit art as an aesthetic production, rather than for people for whom the pieces represent part of their living culture.[42] An engagement with a work of art might be disinterested and universal,

[40] Quoted in Manacroda, Francesco, For Whom Do We Write Exhibitions, Stedeljik Studies, Issue 4, Spring 2016
[41] Iveson, Kurt, *The Mediated City,* Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007
[42] Karlinsky, Amy, Art exhibition catalogues, Etudes/Inuit/Studies, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2004

however, museum interpretation, despite being intended to make encounters with works of art more explicable for more people, struggles to be truly universal or disinterested.

Unlike wall texts, panels or pamphlets that may be handed out at the entrance to exhibitions, catalogues are usually only available in the gift shop after the visit. They therefore may not directly impact on the experience of the visit itself. The purchase of a catalogue has been described as a ritual part of an exhibition visit but one which culminates when the purchaser places it on the bookshelf, "with a sigh of relief – presumably never to look at it again."[43] However, if the purchase of a catalogue is a ritual, it is one which has an impact on the ways in which the experience of the museum visit is imagined beyond the visit itself. For many, the purchase of an exhibition catalogue acts as a souvenir of the visit. Therefore, if the souvenir "authenticates the experience of the viewer,"[44] through becoming the representation and the physical trigger to the memory of the event, even if they remain on the bookshelf, exhibition catalogues shape the ways in which the experiences of the exhibitions, and hence art museums are defined.

According to Susan Stewart, the souvenir lends authenticity to the past through its purchase. Furthermore, the catalogue as souvenir comes to represent not the lived experience of its authors, or even of the artists whose works are within, but rather the "second-hand experience of its possessor/owner".[45] Stewart identifies a further aspect of the souvenir, that its purchase needs to take place within the authentic context of the site itself, thereby validating the purchaser's experience of the site. This complex process, whereby the exhibition catalogue as souvenir becomes the exhibition itself through the creation of the narrative of the visit, authenticates the visit through acting as proof that the purchaser was there and was genuinely engaged with the exhibition. As Stewart points out, "the tourist seeks out objects and scenes, and

[43] Ursprung, Philip, The Indispensable Catalogue, Anyone, No. 20, 2010, p. 99
[44] Stewart, Susan, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, The Gigantic, The Souvenir, the Collection,* Duke University Press, 1992, p. 134
[45] Ibid., p. 135

the relation between the object and its sight is continued, indeed articulated, in the operation of the souvenir".[46] The purchase of the catalogue, potentially regardless of its contents, can therefore act to retrospectively authenticate the experience of the visit and the museum of art.

The voice of textual interpretations at art museums is, therefore, problematic. Developed to encourage a greater depth of engagement for a greater range of visitors, they are in danger of becoming another form of address for imagined publics which are already interested in the subjects under discussion, and which closes rather than opens debates. The catalogue at the BGFA played an important role in the complex public addresses of the institution through articulating the manner in which it was hoped the public would engage with the paintings. By offering visitors to the casino what they might reasonably expect from an art museum visit, rather than offering a pseudo-event,[47] that is an event that only seems like it is genuine, the BGFA presented the engagement with the works as authentic, by offering the presence of knowledge to assert that the experience was real. Furthermore, through defining this engagement it provided validation for the art museum through conforming to practices seen as inherent to all art museums.

[46] Ibid., p. 146
[47] Baudrillard, Jean, *America,* London, Verso, 1988 and Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyper-Reality,* Picador, London, 1986

3. **The catalogue as object**

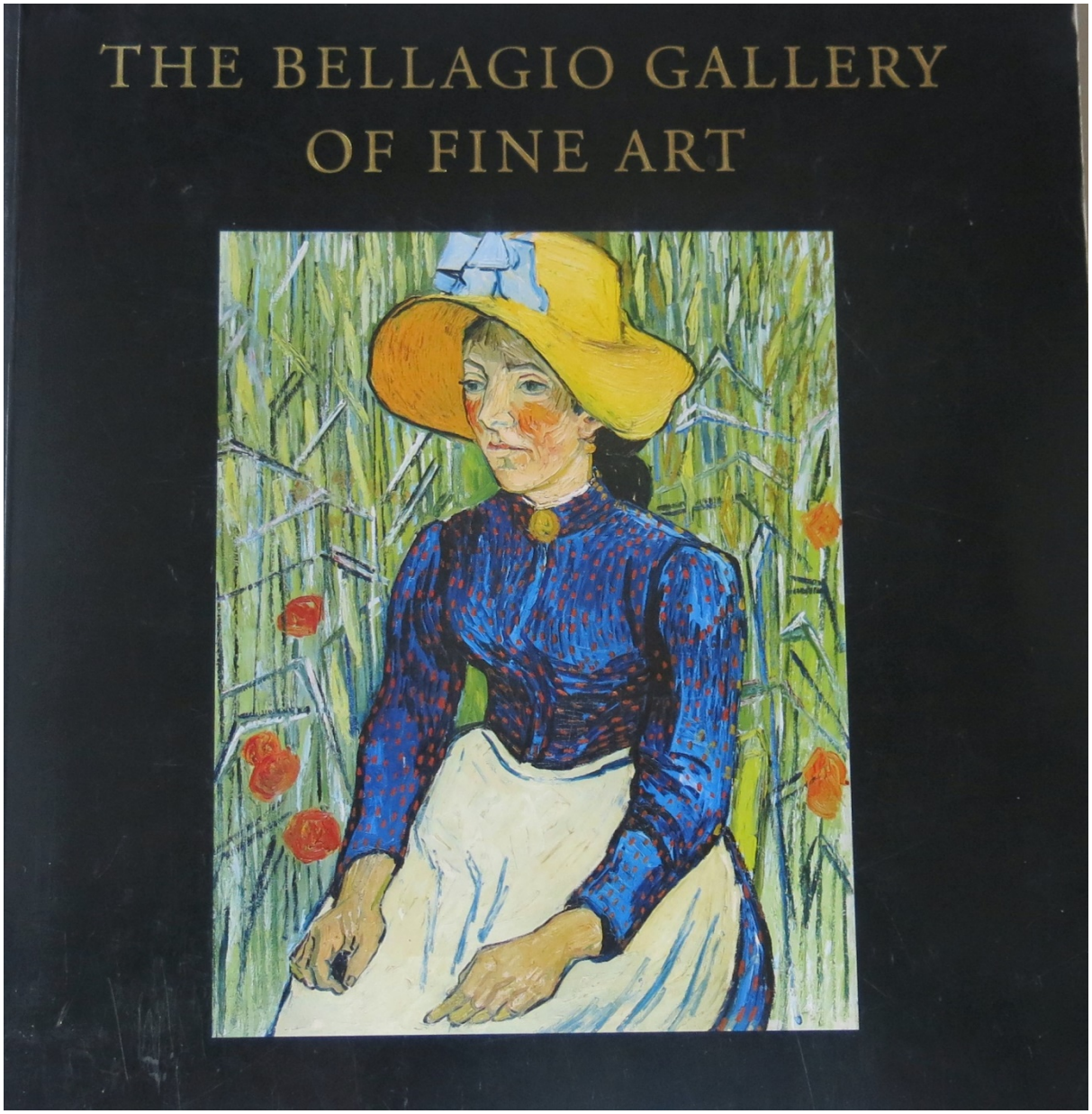

Figure 2. The catalogue of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art

The catalogue for the BGFA was available at the museum shop located at the exit of the BGFA, and was very popular (Fig. 2).[48] It is soft backed, measuring 24 cm. x 22 cm. and is 246 pages long. It is, as stated on the end leaf, printed and bound in Milan, designed by Abraham Brewster and the typeface is "Adobe Garamond, a modern digital interpretation of Paragonne Roman, a

[48] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas ,University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 234

type created by the great sixteenth-century French designer Claude Garamond".[49] In her Editor's Note at the front of the catalogue, the BGFA's curator Libby Lumpkin thanks, amongst others, photographers, production managers, designers, proof readers, and graphic designers. Attention, therefore, is drawn to the physical nature of the catalogue and its existence as an object worthy of note in itself. It is more than just a recording of the Bellagio Gallery collection. Its existence is making a statement about the importance of the collection and asks the reader/visitor to be aware of that.

The explicit reference to the place in which it was printed and bound, and the use of a typeface designed by a 16th Century French designer, is intended to suggest that the catalogue, and by inference the collection, is a luxury item. Just as the design of the Bellagio hoped to suggest sophistication and elegance, so too did the catalogue seek to position itself as an object that should be seen as international and elegant. There are thirty seven essays in the catalogue, including the Introduction, by twenty one contributors. These are set out in a broadly chronological order so that the earliest works appear first and the most recent appear at the end of the catalogue. It is not indicated in the catalogue how the contributors were selected however this is not unusual for exhibition catalogues or collections of essays. Each work has its own essay and although there are introductory pieces by Wynn, Lumpkin and art critic Peter Schjeldahl, the weight of the catalogue is with the essays.

For those who read the catalogue and were familiar with art catalogues from other art museums, therefore, the organisation of the BGFA catalogue would have been familiar. The catalogue for the Thomas Cole exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for instance, also follows many of these conventions. It is large, measuring 28 cm x 25 cm, and was only available in hardback, and therefore is an impressive object in its own right. There are short pieces for every work in the exhibition, contributed by academics from Yale and curators and conservators from the

[49] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 246

Metropolitan and the National Gallery in London. The academic rigour of the catalogue is further enhanced by long essays which interpret Cole's development as an artist in the context of his relationship to Europe. The essays are carefully footnoted and illustrated with images of works not in the exhibition, which gives the catalogue further academic authority. It is an expensively produced object which is offering knowingly academic statements about Thomas Cole which directs reader's views on the artist, his work and their impressions and memories of the exhibition they have seen.[50]

The BGFA catalogue was not innovative nor in any way unique in its design and layout. For instance, the catalogue of the Rubell Family Collection in Miami, another private collection made available to the public, also follows many of the same conventions, with each work fully illustrated and brief essay about each of the artists. Although, unlike the BGFA catalogue, the pieces are written by the artists themselves, they perform a similar function to the inclusion of pieces by art historians, validating the importance of the works and of the artists themselves.[51] By adopting a layout that followed those of other art collection catalogues, the BGFA aligned itself with other catalogues in other institutions and suggested that the catalogue, as well as the collection, was part of the mainstream of art museum institutions and furthermore, a superlative part of that mainstream. By taking its inspiration from catalogues of other art museums it helped stake a claim that the BGFA was not only genuine, but that the experience of visiting was also a genuine museum experience.

The contributors to the catalogue include academics such as Professor Friedrich Bach from the University of Vienna, Professor Roberta Bernstein from the State University of New York, Professor Andrew Forge of the Yale School of Art and Richard Schiff of the University of Texas in Austin; curators such as Susan Davidson of the Menil Collection, Robert Rosenblum, Stephen

[50] Kornhauser, Elizabeth Mankin and Barringer, Tim, *Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings,* New Haven, The Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 204-217
[51] Roselione-Valadez, Juan, ed., *Rubell Family Collection: Highlights and Artist's Writings,* Vol. 1, Miami, Rubell Family Collection, 2014

and Nan Swid Curator of Twentieth Century Art at the Guggenheim and Gary Tinterow of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; art critics such as Jacques Dupin, Robert Gordon and James Lord; as well Charles Moffett, co-chairman of Impressionist, Modern and Contemporary Art at Sotheby's. Many exhibition catalogues will include contributions from the curators of the exhibition itself and the BGFA catalogue does the same with a piece by the BGFA curator Libby Lumpkin on Claes Oldenburg. The approach of commissioning established academics, critics and curators to contribute also follows recognised practice in producing exhibition catalogues. As with an academic book, the contributors are listed at the back of the catalogue with their positions and publications.

The choice of contributors from across the US and overseas, further connects the catalogue and the collection to international practices. It may have been possible to produce a catalogue for the collection using contributors from Las Vegas, or perhaps Nevada. The Nevada Museum of Art in Reno frequently commissions pieces from local writers and academics, for example the year after the BGFA opened the catalogue for the exhibition of the Peter Pool Collection was written by Las Vegas resident Dave Hickey.[52] However, contributors from Ivy League colleges or well-known art museums, writers of biographies and catalogue raisonnés of the relevant artists and those who knew the artists personally, suggested that the paintings must be sufficiently important for academics to write about them.

The inclusion of the list of contributors and their brief resumes is intended to inform the reader not only of whom the contributor is but why they have been asked to write. For instance, Joachim Pissarro, who writes about his great-grandfather Camille Pissarro's work 'Hermitage Garden, Maison Rouge', is according to his resume in the catalogue not only Seymour Knox Curator of European and Contemporary Art at Yale University Art Gallery but he has also written *The Impressionist City: Pissarro's Series Paintings*, *Pissarro* and *Monet and the Mediterranean*, as

[52] Pool, Peter, ed., *The Altered Landscape*, University of Nevada Press, 199

well as curating exhibitions such as 'Pissarro', 'French Impressionism', 'Cezanne and Pissarro: An Impressionist Collaboration' and he is "currently preparing the catalogue raisonné of Camille Pissarro's paintings".[53] The brief biography leaves the reader in little doubt that Joachim Pissarro is a world-wide expert in the works of Camille Pissarro and therefore his interpretation carries the authority of the weight of knowledge which in turn confers value back on to the collection.

The existence of a catalogue for the Bellagio's collection, its physical composition and the way in which its contents are organised and presented combined to present the collection as conferring the casino with "a certain degree of distinction," to use the phrase that Wynn uses in the Foreword.[54] The production of a catalogue that was instantly recognisable as being similar to other museum catalogues was intended to show that the collection should be considered as being authentically of the art museum. If the catalogue was genuine, and the works of art were genuine then the institution in which they were shown might also be authentic. For most art museums this is not a process that requires consideration. However, the location of the BGFA meant that it was challenged to prove its authentic credentials or become considered as inauthentic as the pirate ships and Egyptian artefacts on offer at other casinos. Although catalogues in other art museums may not need to 'prove' that the institutions that produced them were genuine, their production contributes to the cultural capital of museums of art and thereby helps to attract visitors. The very existence of the BGFA catalogue, and its similarity to other catalogues, was an attempt to harness the authenticity associated with mainstream art museums for tourist and leisure purposes. However, the contents of the essays in the catalogue further emphasised the authentic nature of the BGFA by attempting to influence the ways in which people engaged with the works on view.

[53] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 245
[54] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 10

4. Authentic experiences

The BGFA, and Steve Wynn, intended people to think about encountering the collection in experiential terms, possibly as a transcendental experience, and one which was attainable for all visitors. The Gallery was intended to appeal as widely as possible. When the Bellagio and the BGFA opened, Las Vegas artist Jeffrey Vallance declared that it was Wynn's philosophy to "bring art to the people".[55] It was further reported that Wynn intended to reach "the masses,"[56] and he was praised for introducing art to "a whole new world of people".[57] Yet the emotive power of the works on view was also recognised. A reporter for the Las Vegas Sun remarked that, "First I was stunned at the emotions those masterpieces evoked. And when I walked out of the casino, I felt far richer than I had when I'd walked in". He continued, "Even if, like me, you know more about Mark McGwire than Claude Monet, I'm convinced you'll experience something akin to an ardent sports fan's exhilaration at seeing the works of the art world's greatest performers". Repeatedly in interviews Wynn described the BGFA as offering pleasurable experiences. "'I wanted people to appreciate the pictures from a historical point of view,' says Wynn in an interview in his office, 'but I wanted to make sure they didn't miss the sheer immediate pleasure of witnessing these achievements. Because in the end, the measure of their greatness is their ability to produce pleasure in the viewer.'"[58] The BGFA was intended to offer an experiential engagement with art which would have mass appeal.

The catalogue also propounded an experiential engagement with the works in the collection. For instance, Charles Moffett's essay on Van Gogh's painting, 'Peasant Woman Against A Background of Wheat,' which is the cover image of the catalogue, describes the painting as one of "the most exceptional portraits that he produced", and as "astonishing" and "extraordinary".[59]

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[55] Vallance, Jeffrey, Jeffrey Vallance's Top Ten, Artforum, 1 January 1999
[56] Wynning Streak, The Irish Times, 13 February 1999
[57] Biggs, Melissa, Wynn's Showplace, Town and Country, 1 April 1999
[58] Biggs, Melissa, Wynn's Showplace, Town and Country, 1 April 1999
[59] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 71

The visitor to the BGFA is encouraged to experience a unique and remarkable work of art in terms of its immediate aesthetic and emotional impact. Thus, according to the catalogue, the viewer is engaged in an important and unique experience when engaging with this painting. Moffett further asserts the spiritual importance of the painting by linking the figure of the Peasant Woman to those of the Virgin Mary in northern Renaissance works. The Peasant Woman's location in a field of wheat has Christian overtones for Moffett, as not only is the Virgin Mary often depicted in a closed garden surrounded by a millefleur, but wheat in Renaissance painting is often a symbol of the bounty of the earth and the bread of communion. The emotive and transcendental are foregrounded in Moffett's interpretation of the painting.

In the catalogue the engagement with the paintings is a repeatedly described as 'an experience', and one which can be enjoyed by everyone not necessarily those with education or money. However, the BGFA catalogue presented the engagement with the collection as different and superior to other kinds of experiences and it asserted that the experience of enjoying art was universal. A visit to the BGFA was proposed to be an experience, perhaps superior to other leisure pursuits in Las Vegas, however it was an experience nonetheless. The requirements to enjoy a visit, such as the financial ability to holiday in Las Vegas, or to buy a ticket for the BGFA, or education levels, were hidden behind claims for a broad, sweeping universality. On the first page of the catalogue, Wynn claims that,

> "There are few areas of universal agreement about what is truly lovely, graceful, or admirable. One of the subjects on which there is some general agreement, in spite of cultural, economic or social difference, is that of fine art. Somehow great painters and sculptors and their works are held in high esteem by everyone. Attendance at museums in the past few years has exceeded attendance at professional sporting events throughout the USA. This surprising statistic seems to represent a popular and fundamental yearning

in our diverse cultural souls for a glimpse of beauty, a desire to be near examples of singular, creative energy."[60]

According to Wynn, therefore, art can produce agreement across all areas of society, inspire people to look up to artists and their works and sate 'fundamental' desires. In short, its appeal is emotive and universal.

The claims in the catalogue for transcendental aesthetic experiences and universality place the BGFA firmly within the mainstream of art museums where ideas about the ways that beauty can be appreciated are widespread. The Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant's interrogation of the process of aesthetics has been enormously influential in the ways that art appreciation continues to be considered. In his *Critique of Judgement* [61] Kant posed a question: How can essentially subjective judgements which derive from the experiences of individuals also relate to shared ideas of value? To answer this question, Kant proposed that an aesthetic judgement can only be considered to be aesthetic if it was 'disinterested'. For him disinterested judgements were those that were free from desires and were instead only focused on the actual existence of the object and therefore, there could be nothing to separate one person's aesthetic judgement from another's.

These types of aesthetic engagements that are beyond ordinary or common experiences were further influentially propounded in the 20th Century by the art critic Clement Greenberg. Greenberg built on his understanding of Kant's concept of the disinterestedness of aesthetic appreciation to develop his analysis of the experience of art as being something that was separate and unique from everyday life.[62] The extent to which Greenberg's Kant was a true representation of Kantian ideas has been much debated but it is widely recognised that Greenberg did not

[60] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 9 – 10
[61] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009
[62] Greenberg, Clement, Modernist Painting, in Battcock, Gregory, ed., *The New Art: A Critical Anthology,* New York, Dutton Books, 1973

adhere strictly to Kant's understanding of aesthetic experience.[63] Nevertheless, Greenberg's exploration of the ways to engage with modernist art have informed much subsequent thought about the ways in which works of art are experienced, despite antipathy towards his formalist approach to art criticism. Indeed, it has been claimed that it is Greenberg's understanding of Kant that has informed much 20th Century art world criticism of the philosopher rather than an engagement with Kant's writing itself.[64]

Greenberg presents Kant's interpretation of pure aesthetic pleasure as distinguished from other kinds of pleasure and requiring aesthetic disinterestedness. One might get pleasure from owning a work of art but that is not the same as the pure aesthetic pleasure that derives from looking at the same work of art. For Kant, taste in the beautiful is disinterested, which allows for a distinction of the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic, art from non-art, and allows us to displace our attention from the mundane and the everyday. An appreciation of beauty, for Kant, is not grounded in desire. For Greenberg disinterestedness means the ability to make objective and logical judgements of aesthetic value without influence from 'external' interests.[65] Greenberg conflates Kant's concept of disinterestedness as a necessary requirement for aesthetic judgement and his own idea of 'aesthetic distance': "As a result, Greenberg runs together a transcendental theory of the epistemic conditions of aesthetic judgement with a psychological description of a particular empirical state of mind."[66] Although deriving from different understandings of aesthetic encounters, both Kant and Greenberg propose that such an encounter requires the viewer to be in some manner removed from the world of invested interest.

Whenever the aesthetic experience comes from an engagement with the work of art alone, Greenberg insisted, art can produce a 'pure' aesthetic pleasure that while it might feel similar to

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[63] Rajiva, Suma, Art, Nature and Greenberg's Kant, AE: The Canadian Journal of Aesthetics and Costello
[64] Costello, Diarmuid, Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics, Contemporary Art Theory, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, p. 8
[65] Nelson, Robert and Shiff, Richard, *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 253.
[66] Costello, Diarmuid, Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol.65, No, 2, 2007, p. 7

other aesthetic pleasures is in fact completely different and superior. In Greenberg's reading of Kant, pure aesthetic pleasure derives from the ability of the viewer to engage through their own mental acuity and does not come about because the artwork fulfils a pre-existing desire. Therefore, for Greenberg the pleasure of a good meal is fundamentally different from that derived from looking at a painting by Picasso.[67] In *Towards a Newer Laocoon* Greenberg further explores the idea that avant-garde art is pure because it embraces its own medium and does not rely on outside influences.[68] The experience of a work of art, therefore, is presented as unique and removed from the quotidian world and superior to other experiences.

The influence of the modernist approach to the engagement with art works remains strong in art museums that very frequently attempt to create places that encourage experiences that are outside of the quotidian.[69] Through encouraging an engagement that is not directly analogous to other kinds of experience, art museums attempt to create moments of pristine contact between viewers and the works. As explained by Nicholas Wolterstorff:

> "When we engage some work of art for the sake of thereby bringing about some event or act distinct from the act of engagement, our engagement of that work is in the service of what we hope to bring about. By contrast when we engage the work disinterestedly, our engagement is freed from all such servitude".[70]

Moreover, in line with Kant, these forms of disinterested engagements are held to be universal. A universalist approach to aesthetic engagement holds that the values that are important for aesthetic judgement are part of all aesthetic experiences. These also transcend context or history so that aesthetic engagement with a work of art is potentially the same for all those that experience it at any time and in any place.

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[67] Greenberg, Clement, Avant Garde and Kitsch, Horizon, April 1940
[68] Greenberg, Clement, Towards a New Laocoon, Partisan Review, 1940
[69] Costello, Diarmuid, Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics, Contemporary Art Theory, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol.65, No, 2, 2007
[70] Wolterstorf, Nicholas, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 28

Although engagements with works of art may be described as disinterested, this need not mean that they are understood, both within the sector and beyond, as unemotional. There are conflicting impulses in art museums between envisaging looking at art as a private, aesthetic experience or one that can have the power to stir emotions that cannot be reproduced through other activities.[71] As expressed by Glen D. Lowry, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, aesthetic engagements can produce "one moment of wonderment or epiphany".[72] Hence, James Woods, when director of the Art Institute in Chicago, is able to prioritise the experience of the encounter with works of art over potentially educational functions when he says, "we can have all the educational stuff in the world in the galleries, but it comes down to the experience of the individual work of art".[73]

The BGFA catalogue encouraged emotional responses to the collection and presented it as a personalised opportunity to indulge in an experience that would "enrich" the visitor, give them a chance to engage with "beauty" which would "stimulate human consciousness" and "affirm" some of the highest aspects of (Western) civilization.[74] Critic Peter Schjeldahl in the Introduction to the catalogue contends that there is a separation between aesthetic appreciation and the immediate sensations of the everyday. The purpose of Las Vegas "happens to be the pursuit of pleasure," and while "all pleasures are pleasurable … not all are equal".[75] Schjeldahl separates the pleasure to be enjoyed through an appreciation of art from the pleasure to be enjoyed in other ways such as gambling in Las Vegas and in so doing echoes Kant's identification of judgements of beauty and judgements of sensation. Through using words and phrases that draw attention to the physical nature of the works, such as "colour", "texture" and "the physical process of

[71] See for instance, Rice, Danielle, Balancing Act: Education and the Competing Impulses of Museum Work, Art Institute of Chicago Studies, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2003; Budd, Malcolm, *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Music*, London, Penguin, 1996 or Freeman, Daniel, *Art's Emotion; Ethics, Expression and Aesthetic Experience*, London, Routledge, 2011
[72] Cuno, James ed., *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 185
[73] Ibid., p. 183
[74] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 13-17
[75] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 13

painting", Schjeldahl focuses on the immediate impact that these works can have and does not seek to connect them to social, political or economic issues outside of the paintings themselves.

Schjeldahl's essay assures the reader that there is 'truth' on display in the collection. To understand this truth, however, "calls on our abilities to feel and imagine, not to think" and requires, "a suspension of intellect in sheerly beholding".[76] In Schjeldahl's description, therefore, engagement with the collection is entirely experiential, and one that does not require previous knowledge or experience of visiting art museums. Schjeldahl is describing a very Greenbergian approach to art appreciation that places engagements with works as separate from the everyday. These are special moments, Schjeldahl assures us, but special because they are outside of the quotidian. The location of the collection in Las Vegas, allows for the paintings to be seen in relation to the city, but this process, according to Schjeldahl, is one of disinterested aesthetic appreciation.

Through interpreting the collection as offering an emotional and aesthetic response the catalogue worked to insulate the experience at the museum from experiences in the outside world in the casino or beyond. For instance, the essay on Monet's 'Water Lily Pond with Bridge' directs the viewer's experience of this painting away from any readings of the work that might situate it in the quotidian world. Schjeldahl describes this painting as acting as a "moisturizer of the soul,"[77] implying that viewers' souls are dry and in need of attention that can only be gained through an engagement with art. That engagement is described by him in terms that emphatically echo a religious experience. Not only does he claim that the work effects the souls of those who see it but that it "observes a high holy day," which leads to a realisation of the "solemnity" of the collection. [78] The painting has "a sacred quality" he claims.[79] The direct religious connotation of the language means that the engagement with 'Water Lily Pond with Bridge' is presented in

[76] Lumpkin, 1988, p. 15
[77] Lumpkin, 1998, p.14
[78] Lumpkin, 1998, p.14
[79] Lumpkin, 1998, p.14

terms which suggest a spiritual kind of engagement that by definition is separate from our everyday experiences. However, it is an emotional and sensory rather than intellectual experience, a process of feeling rather than thinking. Schjeldahl is encouraging a direct engagement that privileges direct experience. In so doing he presents the BGFA as offering a significant and emotive aesthetic experience that is a different kind of experience to those offered in the casino but which can be understood as commensurate with those experiences.

The essay on 'Water Lily Pond with Bridge' by Robert Gordon also uses vocabulary that suggests a religious, transcendental approach to the work. Gordon describes the scene as Monet's "personally created paradise"[80] which was "its own timeless universe".[81] As Gordon puts it, the scene depicted by Monet in the painting is of a world beyond the everyday that is both a 'paradise' and 'timeless universe'. Gordon describes in some detail, how Monet struggled to create the water lily pond in the face of resistance from regional authorities, his neighbours and local farmers, how he had to exchange parcels of land with some neighbours, and buy land from others and finally to pay for a local road to be tarred, so that the dust would not be blown onto his lilies. For Gordon these are the justifiable actions of an artist attempting to create a 'paradise'. There is no suggestion that Monet's neighbours might have had reasonable arguments for objecting to his plans or that there are any political, economic or social perspectives on Monet's development of his garden or, indeed, the painting. The construction of the garden and the pond, the struggles of the artist to create his perfect world both against nature and against humanity, seems, for Gordon, to place him beyond the world of people who struggle within the everyday and into the realm of those who seek (and manage) to alter the everyday.

The catalogue presented to visitors and readers a way to engage with the works of art in the collection that privileged an aestheticized, disinterested experience. The paintings on view could, according to the catalogue, be approached entirely on the basis of emotional reactions, while

[80] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 53
[81] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 56

other kinds of engagements, which might have introduced political or social concerns, are ignored. The BGFA was very much in the mainstream of art museums by proposing such an approach and this in turn contributed to the claims for authenticity of the institution. If "moments of epiphany" can take place at the Met in New York so too can "a life-affirming rapture" take place at the BGFA.[82] Yet, we must ask, as Bourdieu does, why are these kinds of disinterested and universal encounters promoted by these art museums. In Las Vegas, the answer lies in the tourism focus on the casino.

5. Tourism and luxury

The US's 'experience economy' means that the provision of leisure services, including tourism, has become the most important sector of the economy, more so than industry or services.[83] The US leads the world in leisure and tourism spending, accounting for 16.9% of world spending at $793 billion in 2019.[84] Las Vegas has reaped substantial financial rewards from the increasing leisure spending of Americans and tourism is the lifeblood of Las Vegas with an average of 37 million people visiting a year, compared to a local population of about 1.5 million in 2000. In 2004, 20% of all jobs in the city were gaming-related and therefore tourist-related.[85] In 1998, the year that the BGFA opened, gaming revenue in Clark County, the district of Las Vegas where the Strip is located, was $6.3 billion and in 2007 this would reach an all-time peak of $10.8 billion.[86] As tourists pay a disproportionate amount of taxes through levies on gambling, hotel rooms and a sales tax, their importance to the economy of the state and the city is paramount. The provision of leisure, entertainment and tourist opportunities in the city, therefore, is extremely sophisticated, leaving nothing to chance as the tourists' activities are directed and markers as to where to, how to and when to behave are carefully provided.

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[82] Lumpkin. 1998. 16
[83] Pine, Joseph and Gilmore, James, *The Experience Economy*, Boston, Harvard Business School, 1999
[84] US Travel Overview, March 2020
[85] University of Nevada, Center for Business and Economic Research, accessed at www.city-data.com – 3/2017
[86] Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority, http://www.lvcva.com/includes/content/images/media/docs/Historical-1970-to-2013.pdf - accessed 3/2017

One of the defining features of modern tourism is that it enables people to escape 'reality' and literally and figuratively, 'get away from it all'. Tourists travel to other places so that they can enter into different environments and, once they arrive they want to take part in activities that are not part of their everyday lives. Whether it is sitting on a beach, shopping in a street market, meeting new people or seeing works of art, our tourist experiences must contrast to our everyday lives. Through this contrast between the quotidian and the tourist experience, the 'tourist gaze' can be discerned.[87] As discussed in the Introduction, the 'tourist gaze' does not allow for political or sociological readings of what it sees and is instead primarily concerned with engagements with local 'colour' only for the purposes of entertainment. However, authenticity is essential for the tourist gaze, even if this only conforms to pre-existing expectations.[88] Hence, offering preconceived experiences becomes a proof of authenticity, even, if, in fact, they are divorced from reality. Therefore, experiences must be simultaneously different and the same as expected. Both casinos and art museums understand this and offer environments which are separate from their surroundings, in which actions are regulated and supervised and which deliberately do not engage with institutions' operational realities if these conflict with the creation of these conceptually and physically separate spaces, while at the same time conforming to expectations.

John Urry identified a number of different tourist gazes, such as seeing signs that indicate that an object is important. The marker becomes the distinctive sight, for example, "in art galleries when part of what is gazed at is the name of the artist, 'Rembrandt' say, as much as the painting itself, which may be difficult to distinguish from many others in the same gallery".[89] In this particular tourist gaze, interpretation plays a vital role. Part of this type of tourist experience, therefore, rests in the available interpretation which gives visitors the necessary 'clues' about how to react. Furthermore, tourist reactions to works of art, Urry points out, are connected to the recognition

[87] Urry, John*, The Tourist Gaze, Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London, Sage Publications, 1990
[88] Rothman, Hal, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism and the Twentieth Century American West,* Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1998
[89] Urry, John, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society,* London, Sage Publications, 2002, p.13

of the artist's name. The context of these works, either in which they were produced or in terms of their contemporary meanings and functions for the indigenous society around the museum are less important for the tourist than the meanings and functions that the works perform. One of the attractions of the art gallery for tourists is that it is indisputably 'authentic'. The works that are on view are 'unique' and have been created by 'a master'. To see them one must travel to the relevant art gallery.[90] Thus, the tourist gaze demands authenticity in the works of art that are viewed and imposes preconceived ideas of the kind of experiences that are offered to justify the authenticity of the visit. The ways that art museums interpret aesthetic encounters are vital to this process.

For most people owning a painting by Claude Monet is impossible due to the extremely high prices for his works. However, enjoying a painting by Monet is an experience which can be enjoyed by many, even if in most US museums one has to purchase a ticket. Engagement with works of art has gone from being an experience that only a few could enjoy, to being one that is within the reach of virtually everyone who wants it. However the linkage of the kinds of aesthetic experiences available at art museums with concepts of luxury rest on an understanding of art that it is inherently a pastime for certain groups of people, in particular those with above average incomes, as supported by Bourdieu's research in *The Love of Art*[91] and research on visitors to US museums.[92] Although access to art is possible across the US, and frequently ticket prices are kept to a minimum, visitor surveys reveal that those engaging with art are not representative of US demographics.[93] Intriguingly, anecdotal evidence suggests that the offer of a luxury art

[90] Lumley, Robert, Introduction, in Lumley Robert, ed., *The Museum Time Machine,* London, Routledge, 1995, p.15
[91] Bourdieu, Pierre & Darbel, Alain, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997
[92] National Endowment for the Arts: *US Patterns of Arts Participation,* December 2019
[93] Schuster, J. Mark Davidson, The Public Interest in the Art Museum's Public, in New Research in Museum Studies: An International Series, Art in Museums, London, The Athlone Press,

experience in Las Vegas was attractive to many visitors who otherwise might not have engaged with works of art.[94]

The BGFA had no outreach programme and no schools programme. The lack of pedagogic intent was confirmed by Kathy Clewell, registrar at the BGFA, when she said that the museum "had no mission to educate or open new fields in the history of art".[95] Its intended and stated audience were tourists rather than the inhabitants of the city. Although there are no visitor demographics for the BGFA some research has been done on the ways that Las Vegas inhabitants use casinos on the Strip. In the main those who live in the city avoid the larger casinos, preferring to visit smaller, more local venues if they wish to gamble.[96] With no programme to reach out to the city's inhabitants it is likely that the bulk of the visitors to the gallery were from out of town. In the Forward written by Wynn he states that he is offering the collection to "our guests".[97]

The use of elite signifiers, such as art, in creating tourist destinations that offer commodified luxury experiences is increasingly common in the US, although not just in art museums. James Twitchell shows how in the US over the course of the 20th Century, luxury has gone from being available for only a small segment of society to one that has mass engagement, even if the products, or experiences, themselves may not be considered by the cognoscenti to be luxury. Twitchell refers to this as 'opuluxe', which is "at its peak, a liminal experience, a lifting up and out of the dreary and vulgar world".[98] When Wynn describes the Bellagio in the catalogue as "a place of ideal beauty and comfort, the world as it might be if everything was just right," he is

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[94] Garfield, Simon, How Las Vegas Got the Culture Bug, The Mail on Sunday, 15 November 1998; Biggs, Melissa, Wynn's Showplace, Town and Country, 1 April 1999; Kimmelman, Michael, In An Unreal City, Real Masterworks Beat the Odds, The New York Times, 6 December 1998

[95] Newsnight, Las Vegas Gets A Guggenheim, 4 April 2001, quoted in Ryan, Nicola, *A Capital Encounter: Commerce Culture and Exchange,* unpublished PhD, 2007

[96] Shinnar, Rachel, Young, Cheri, Corsun, David, Las Vegas Locals as Gamblers and Hosts to Visiting Friends and Family: Characteristics of Gaming Behaviour, UNLV Gaming Research and Review Journal, Vol. 8, Issue 2,

[97] Lumpkin, p. 10

[98] Twitchell, James, *Living it Up: Our Love Affair With Luxury,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p.64

describing the move away from the 'dreary and vulgar' to the 'ideal' in his luxury casino.[99] The experience of visiting the BGFA, when presented as a luxury experience, contributed to the image of the casino as a luxury destination through the provision of something that is intimately linked with wealth. Indeed, the creation of the collection is described by Peter Schjeldahl in the Introduction as requiring "wealth and will'.[100]

The choice to collect artists such as Picasso, Monet, Jackson Pollock and Van Gogh was intended to add to the luxury image of the casino so that it became, in the words of Wynn, "a place of special elegance, quality and distinction".[101] Indeed, Wynn stated in an interview that, "We don't just have great paintings, we have great paintings by famous artists."[102] The quality of the works themselves was of equal importance as the recognition of the names of the artists. The collection would add to the 'opuluxe' brand of the casino by offering genuine works of art by artists who were recognisably part of the cannon of 'great' artists; part of "a body of works, deemed to be of indisputable quality".[103] The possibility of seeing works of art by 'famous' artists, an opportunity not available elsewhere in Las Vegas, or Nevada, at the time of the opening of the BGFA, was intended as another sign of the quality of the Bellagio. Indeed, the recognition of famous names in art galleries is part of the 'tourist gaze' as it serves to authenticate and validate the encounter with the work of art. The names of the artists act as a kind of advertisement for the casino and the gallery, and at the same time contribute to the visiting experience.[104]

Tourism is essential to Las Vegas and the Bellagio was built to take part in this industry. As we have seen the BGFA was created to take part in the process of attracting visitors to the casino. Tourism in Vegas offers people the chance to engage with experiences that are not possible in

[99] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 9
[100] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 13
[101] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 9
[102] Stewart, Anna, King of Vegas bets £1bn in luxury stakes, The Daily Mail, 22 February 1998
[103] Perry, Gill and Cunningham, Colin, *Academies, Museums and Cannons of Art,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999, p.12
[104] Wynning Streak, Irish Times, 13 February 1999

their everyday lives and, in the case of the Bellagio, to take part in luxury that is outside of quotidian experiences. It is, therefore, possible to see how, for creators of tourist venues that present unique experiences that offer supposedly authentic, luxury experiences that are deliberately separate from the everyday, a disinterested engagement with art could be seen as performing the same function. Not only did this kind of engagement with works of art serve to authenticate the BGFA by aligning it to mainstream ideal of aesthetic engagement, it also conformed to a widespread tourist ideal of experiences that are separated from everyday experiences. The authenticating signifiers of the catalogue were used within a leisure context – legitimisation was intended to support popularisation. Experiential tourism, an acknowledgment of tourists' wish to 'get away from it all', a desire to create a "place of ideal beauty,"[105] and the view that art is best appreciated as a modernist experience were conflated at the BGFA to create an art museum that encouraged disinterested aesthetic engagements against a backdrop of luxury leisure tourist experiences.

6. Dialogues around 'Dialogue of Insects'

Figure 4. Joan Miro, Dialogue of Insects, oil on canvas, 73 cm x 92 cm. 1924-1925

[105] Lumpkin, 1998, p.9

We have seen that the 'exhibition script' is intended to influence the ways in which visitors think about the authenticity of the works, their aesthetic encounters, and also about the institution itself. Therefore, interpretation in an art museum is a primary and powerful channel to influence visitor experiences. At the BGFA this process was also part of a wider tourist offering which gave people the opportunity to leave the everyday world behind. The BGFA presented itself as offering authentic, experiential engagements with the collection. The collection consisted of works by famous artists and the recognition of their names was intended to contribute to the luxury theme of the casino. However, as forcefully expressed in the catalogue, it did not describe itself as offering experiences that were commensurate with the other attractions in the casino. As set out in the catalogue, the superiority of the BGFA experience rested on the ability of the works of art to produce significant emotional responses. The paintings were often described in transcendental terms in the catalogue and visitors were encouraged to react in emotive ways and which were divorced from the influences of the quotidian world. This modernist approach to art appreciation excluded external interests and focused instead on the physicality of the paintings and the biographies of the artists. In this section we will look a specific painting in the collection, Miro's 'Dialogue of Insects' to interrogate what the interpretation of this particular painting reveals about this process.

Joan Miro's 'Dialogue of Insects' (Fig. 4) was one of the most important paintings in the BGFA collection. When exhibited at the National Gallery in London in 1990 it was described by Andrew Graham-Dixon as "one of the finest works of Joan Miro's mid-career".[106] After seeing it at the BGFA, art critic Robert Hughes described it as "one of the best Joan Miros in existence" with "its precise forms buzzing and chirruping with strange lepidopteral life in a bare dream landscape".[107] In the Introduction to the catalogue Peter Schjeldahl asserts that the painting is

[106] Graham-Dixon, Andrew, National Gallery Gains £250 million Art Treasure, The Independent, 20 May 1990
[107] Hughes, Robert, Art Class, Time Magazine, 2 November 1998

"one of the best made by anyone in the middle of the 1920's".[108] Painted in 1924-1925, 'Dialogue of Insects' shows Miro developing his own idiosyncratic iconography. Utilising the deep blue that would become a recurring colour in Miro's works, the painting has an enigmatic quality that draws the viewer in. The figures depicted in it, at first glance, might seem to be abstractions, but on closer inspection they appear to be almost half-recognised creatures from our own world. The painting has passed through a number of collections and been exhibited widely around the world.

The essay on 'Dialogue of Insects' is contributed by Jacques Dupin. Dupin is described in the Contributors section as an author who has written *Miro*[109] and a monograph on Giacometti, as well as being the recipient of the Grand Prix National de Poesie in 1988. This description makes it clear that Dupin is an art historian and also a poet of national standing in France. However, the brief biography does not mention that Dupin, as well as being a poet and art critic, was also on the board of the Galerie Maeght in Paris which represented Miro. Nor does it mention that he was a friend of Miro's, or that after the artist's death he was empowered by the family as the only person to authenticate his work.[110] Finally, as there is no provenance given for the works in the catalogue, the reader cannot know that 'Dialogue of Insects' was sold through the Galerie Maeght in 1988. By not including this information, the brief biography implies that Dupin was an objective and academic observer of Miro's life rather than an active participant. A reader would, on the basis of the description given of Dupin's life, think that his interest in Miro was only academic when in fact, it was far more complex. The interpretation of the artist and his work in the BGFA catalogue rests, therefore, on an ideal of academic balance that was underpinned by the decision to describe Dupin only as an art historian. Hence, his views could be understood to be derived from neutral academic excellence rather than clouded by subjectivity.

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[108] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 15
[109] Dupin, Jacques, *Miro*, London, Flammarion, 2004
[110] L'Express, Obituary, 29 October 2012

A reader familiar with museum catalogues and academic texts would find much to recognise in Dupin's essay. The text quotes from a letter by Miro written in 1918 and a description of Miro by his friend, the French poet Andre Breton. Both quotes are properly footnoted as might be expected in an academic text. The use of quotes confirms the knowledge of the author, while the footnotes allow for ideals of academic neutrality by offering the possibility of fact checking by the reader should they wish. Dupin also links 'Dialogue of Insects' to other works by Miro, specifically 'Carnival of Harlequins' (exhibited with 'Dialogue of Insects' in the first Surrealist Exhibition in 1925) and 'Dog Barking at the Moon'. Both these paintings are illustrated in the catalogue, albeit in black and white reproductions. Other paintings by Miro, not mentioned in the text, are also illustrated 'The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)' and 'The Tilled Field (La Terre Labouree). Sketches made by the artist are also illustrated and referred to in the text. This is common practice for museum catalogues and would have been familiar to those who had previously read catalogues. The authenticity of the essay, and the other essays in the catalogue, was intended to answer those who doubted that the paintings were 'real'. However, the academic neutrality of the essay was intended to confirm the academic status of the interpretation, which in turn proclaimed its authenticity. The way in which the essays were presented as academic works acted as a form of symbolic capital that legitimized the institution.

In order to comprehend the painting, Dupin describes the "fantastical universe" that seems to deny logic and reason, so that Miro's "unique and explicit pictorial language," can be understood.[111] Dupin's deep knowledge of the artist and his works will help the viewer to navigate their way around the confusions presented to them. It is implied that, without the interpretation presented in the catalogue it may not be possible for the casual viewer to know what the various figures represent. The catalogue's interpretation of the painting assumes that

[111] Lumpkin, 1998, p.

the viewer requires the writer's knowledge to understand what they are looking at. The imagined reader, therefore, is one that is interested in the painting but has no previous knowledge.

Dupin presents Miro's painting as a love-letter to his homeland of Catalonia, where the fantastical unreality of the symbolically rendered insects and plants represents a "a world like few others". The subject of the natural world, and the absence of the man-made world, for Dupin, shows Miro's love of the land and of nature and once the viewer decodes the creatures, objects and symbols, the fundamentally rustic and knowable nature of the painting is revealed. Repeatedly Dupin proposes that the way to comprehend the painting is through Miro's love of nature. In so doing he is seeking to influence the ways in which the painting is understood by those that see it. The reader is told that Miro focuses on grasses, flowers, insects and birds, that he is "unswervingly faithful to the earth", and devoted to the world of nature. The various figures in the painting are described by Dupin as having "humour and invention," as playing games, as in harmony, bursting like a brilliant flower, as erotic, as standing boldly, "light and humorous," and as having cheerful humour.[112] The natural setting of the painting, therefore, is complimented by the fundamentally pleasurable – and funny – creatures that populate it which are unthreatening and graspable.

The description of the painting as rustic and humorous is also applied to its creator. Miro was, according to Dupin, neither fantastic nor avant-garde in his character and he could perhaps be understood and appreciated by anyone who was not knowledgeable about art. Dupin attempts, therefore, to demystify the work by directly relating it to the homely qualities of its creator. The comparison between Miro and the subjects of his painting is made explicitly and is justified by a quote from Andre Breton who described Miro as being like an insect. Yet there is another, more subtle, description of the painter in Dupin's essay. The process of producing a work of art is frequently described as 'creation'. Yet Dupin hints that Miro is not only engaged in the creation

[112] Lumpkin, 1998, pp. 155 - 161

of a work of art but of a whole new world. A letter from Miro, written when he was 18, is quoted in which he says that an understanding of small elements of nature such as a blade of grass, is divine. He repeatedly describes the process whereby recognisable creatures are changed when used in this painting as a 'metamorphosis,' or a 'transformation'. Dupin writes: "Carried away by these earthly and cosmic forces, Miro brought the eye and the unconscious together, transmuted into figures representing a fantastic universe, a world like no others".[113] As well as being a humble, knowable person, Miro was also the creator of worlds, a transcendental figure.

Jacques Dupin's biography of Miro is considered to be one of the key works on the artist's life and, in terms of an analysis of Miro's stylistic development it remains a benchmark. The biography is more than the recounting of the incidents in Miro's life. Dupin undertakes a sustained aesthetic criticism of Miro's works and charts the deliberate and consistent move away from describing reality towards ever greater symbolism. In this formal analysis Dupin allows little or no mention of politics, class or economics as factors in Miro's artistic development. For Dupin, Miro was completely absorbed by his artistic endeavours to the exclusion of all other concerns. The choice of Dupin, as a contributor to the BGFA catalogue may have rested on his academic work but may also have been related to his modernist approach to the artist.

As well as being structured as an authentic academic essay, the approach to the painting was also in line with the ways that Miro's work was presented in other art museums. In 1998, the same year that BGFA opened, Agnes de la Beaumelle, a curator at the Musee National d'art Moderne, at the Pompidou Centre, contributed a series of catalogue entries on paintings by Miro for 'Rendezvous: Masterpieces from the Centre George Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museums'. Four paintings by Miro in the exhibition were painted in the same year as 'Dialogue of Insects'. De la Beaumelle, describes each painting ('Bathers', 'The Check', 'Painting' and 'Personnage') in detail and, as with Dupin's BGFA essay, attempts to explain the meanings of the imagery and

[113] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 161

motifs. The motivations for the paintings are all personal. In particular de la Beaumelle discusses how Alfred Jarry's novel *The Supermale*[114] may have been the influence for 'The Check', yet does not mention the political and gender issues raised in the novel or the painting. The interpretation for these paintings rests exclusively on formal readings of the works themselves and the intellectual life of the artist with no reference to social or political factors.[115]

There are, however, other readings of this painting that allow for a greater connection to political or social influences. At the time Miro painted 'Dialogue of Insects', his homeland of Catalonia was under the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera. Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale, co-curators of 'Joan Miro: The Ladder of Escape' at Tate Modern in 2011, assert that Miro identified himself with Catalan small farmers and tenants some of which were politically motivated towards separatism and some even towards anarchism.[116] While Dupin argues that the figures in 'Dialogue of Insects' are humorous and poetic, for Daniel and Gale the figures reveal the seriousness and anxieties of the artist and while for Dupin the work indicates a focus on nature at the expense of the world of man, for Daniel and Gale, Miro's choice of subject shows the opposite, as it reveals his political engagement.

Another perspective on this group of paintings is given by Rory Doepel. For Doepel, the symbolism used by Miro does not reflect the influence of Surrealist inspired unconscious action or automatic drawing. Instead, he points to the meticulous preparatory drawings Miro produced as evidence that everything in these paintings was carefully considered in advance. Nor is Doepel convinced that the works have a political message. For Doepel the symbolism of Miro's work derives from the primary Kabbalist text. He points to the unusually shaped moon with flames, which appears in a number of later works by Miro and links it to images of the Kabbalist Bridge or the presence of God in female form. The black stalk, identified as wheat by Dupin, is,

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[114] Jarry, Alfred, *The Supermale,* London, Exact Change, 1999
[115] Bois, Yves-Alain, ed. Rendezvous: Masterpieces from the Centre George Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museums, New York, Harry Adrams, 1998
[116] Daniel, Marko and Gale, Matthew, *Joan Miro: The Ladder of Escape,* London, Tate Publishing, 2011

according the Doepel, a reference to the tree of life, another Kabbalist symbol. For Doepel the inclusion of images not encountered in Kabbalist texts such as insects "would suggest that he (Miro) did not merely illustrate the text but that rather he used the text as a springboard for his characterization of the Ancient One, drawing freely on images without fully analysing their significance in their original context".[117]

Mary Acton, meanwhile, states that "you are left to decide for yourself what it is you really are looking at".[118] Acton, writing in the year before the opening of the BGFA, agrees with Dupin that the painting has a dream-like quality and that the figures are insect-like. However, she disagrees with his analysis that it is possible to identify any relationship between the figures and 'real' creatures. Where Dupin sees spiders, crickets and butterflies, Acton sees uncertainty. She even doubts that the blue area might represent the sky while the brown could be the ground. Most importantly, unlike Dupin she states that "the meaning is uncertain".[119] The responsibility for the interpretation of the painting, therefore, moves away from academics or curators and is under the control of the viewer.

The essay on Miro contributed to the conception that the BGFA was an authentic art museum and therefore that the experience of engaging with Miro's painting was 'genuine'. The art scholarship on display in the essay was, deliberately, in-line with the kind of essay or article that can be found in other catalogues or academic texts. Whether readers recognised these similarities, the knowledge provided and the neutral academic approach, coupled with the focus on the art history credentials of the author, conferred authority, which was utilised to validate a particular type of experience. The academic nature of the catalogue essays was a legitimising function of the institution.

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[117] Doepel, Rory, Zoharic imagery in the work of Miro (1924-1933), in South African Journal of Culture and Art History, Vol 1., No. 1, 1987
[118] Acton, Mary, Learning to Look at Paintings, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 22
[119] Ibid., p. 22

The essay by Dupin, and the catalogue more widely, supported the 'tourist gaze' in the Gallery. The modernist disinterested approach to reading the painting meant that visitors to the gallery were symbolically separated from their own experiences outside of the gallery. The process of focusing aesthetic engagements completely on the painting and its creator has the effect of excluding the influence of the viewers' own intellectual and emotive responses. In this, the BGFA, was also adopting behaviours from larger, longer-established art museums. The process of separating the everyday from tourist experiences is aided by art museum interpretation which proposes a single reading of a work of art that must exclude all alternative readings. Dupin's approach is not unique amongst art historians and curators and is in fact common, for instance, the Thomas Cole catalogue discussed above, examines his series 'The Course of Empire' at great length but does not discuss whether any of Cole's fears about empire, commercialisation or environmental destruction have contemporary relevance.[120] To do so would allow the essay to stray out of the confines of art historical discourse and upset readers who disagreed with the writers' views on society.

The exclusion of potentially contentious political or social themes from tourist experiences is repeated in the BGFA interpretation. Considerations of nationality, or of separation from one's homeland, of politics or economics (it has been suggested that, in part, Miro's symbolism was derived from hallucinations induced by hunger), or of religions (occult or otherwise) are outside the scope of the painting and therefore, not part of this type of analysis. While the tourist gaze generally excludes the everyday it is also influenced by encounters with supposedly authentic activities or objects and, where the tourist is unsure how to react to these, interpretation is key. The presentation of 'Dialogue of Insects' as an important work of art, through its inclusion in the collection, inclusion in the catalogue and through the ways in which it was interpreted, provided the necessary 'clues' as to how to experience the painting. Through legitimising the

[120] Kornhauser, Elizabeth Mankin and Barringer, Tim, *Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings,* New Haven, The Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 204-217

painting and the institution, the essay on 'Dialogue of Insects' became part of the tourist experience of 'getting away from it all'.

7. Dolphins in the desert

Dupin's essay exemplifies how ideals of authenticity at the Gallery were utilised as part of the casino's tourist offering. The very act of interpretation supported the assertion that the paintings were displayed in an authentic museum, and thereby was intended to assure visitors that they were looking at the 'real thing'. It also served to channel their experiences by suggesting an approach to aesthetic encounters that was at once authentically of the art museum and also compatible with ideals of experiential tourism that excluded the everyday from tourist experiences. Miro's painting could be enjoyed and understood in uncontentious ways, regardless of the life-experiences of the visitor, as engagement was presented as universal and disinterested. While these kinds of experiences are presented as being possible for everyone, the BGFA did not describe itself as a populist space but rather as one that was a legitimate art museum. Through this kind of engagement with the works of art, the BGFA was seeking to understand and reconnect to the past. However, at the same time it was seeking to create an environment in which unwanted aspects of the present could be barred and, hence, a new reality could be created. This ideal of authenticity was central to the ways in which visitors were addressed and experiences managed. However, the engagements proposed by the BGFA not only sought to act in contrast to those offered in the casino but also ignored the realities of Steve Wynn and the Bellagio's economic and political actions.

For Pierre Bourdieu, the focus on experiential and disinterested engagements by art institutions is a tactic that is used to mask the institutions' actions:

> "I would simply ask why so many critics, so many writers, so many philosophers take such satisfaction in professing that the experience of a work of art is ineffable, that it

> escapes by definition all rational understanding; why are they so eager to concede without a struggle the defeat of knowledge; and where does their irrepressible need to belittle rational understanding come from, this rage to affirm the irreducibility of the work of art, or, to use a more suitable word, its transcendence."[121]

Why, therefore, was Peter Schjeldahl proposing that the best way to engage with the works in the collection was "a suspension of intellect in sheerly beholding'?[122] Bourdieu identifies the motives for seeking a transcendental approach to art appreciation in *Distinction.*[123] As the ideal of a disinterested aesthetic gaze brings with it concepts of a break with the quotidian world, to be able to make this separation and appreciate it is, for Bourdieu, a signifier of 'distinction,' because, although a disinterested appreciation is held to be universal, in reality it is only possible for some segments of society. Those that understand art and art museums are able to take these intellectual positions, however, they may not be obvious to everyone. Therefore, for Bourdieu, taste is not the result of something innate which in theory is available to everyone, it is socially conditioned and reflective of hierarchies that are determined by dominant groups.

Bourdieu identifies the focus on disinterested experiences as serving to separate the experiences proposed for visitors within the art museum from the actions of the institution. This perspective is expressed by Glenn D. Lowry, the Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York:

> "We want our art galleries to be places of repose and contemplation; venues of discovery and learning, awe and wonder, where we can become absorbed in the power and beauty of art. We do not expect them to have to deal with labour disputes and the harsh realities of the work place, and when they do, we expect them to act in a way that is consistent

[121] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field,* London, Polity Press, 1996
[122] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 15
[123] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010

with the values espoused by the art they display, no matter how practical or appropriate this might be."[124]

The influence that the institution is seeking to have is not solely on the ways that visitors engage with works of art but on the ways that they think about the institution. Through being encouraged to use a series of perceptual schemes that are offered through the art museum, they are at the same time encouraged to abandon relationships to quotidian life. In the same way, visitors are asked to abandon the ways in which they might assess the institution itself and focus on the experiential nature of their visit. The financial and political aspects of the BGFA were obscured by the interpretative insistence that the quotidian world should be ignored.

The purpose of the BGFA, as stated by Wynn was to act as an attraction and as part of the casino's leisure offerings. However, encouraging disinterested aesthetic encounters, if they had minimal appeal, or served to exclude potential customers, would not have made business sense. Indeed, the casino and Wynn were quoted as intending the BGFA to introduce art to people who had previously not engaged with art. According to a casino spokesman: "The Bellagio is for every type of person visiting Vegas. It is a unique opportunity to see some of the greatest achievements in history and when people see it that way they are naturally drawn to the gallery".[125] However, as we have seen, the BGFA was very much part of the mainstream of art museums. It was the art museum's location that acted to support the seemingly populist assertions of Wynn and his spokespeople, rather than the type of art museum that they created. The relationship that the BGFA had to aesthetic encounters extended beyond the provision of interpretation that promoted disinterested experiences, to the ways in which it used ideals of distinction to validate itself while at the same time obfuscating the ways in which the BGFA was utilised to achieve economic and political goals.

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[124] Cuno, James ed., *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p.134
[125] Any Takers for a $1 billion bet that a Las Vegas gambling joint has one of the world's finest art collections?, The Scotsman, 10 May 1999

As with most US art museums the BGFA charged for entry and hence income from ticket sales was a consideration. Tickets were initially $10, which was increased to $12 within six months of the Bellagio opening, and half of all visitors spent a further $4 on an audio guide, derived from the catalogue and narrated by Wynn.[126] Furthermore, visitors to the Bellagio who might be staying at other resort-casinos might spend up to $25 each during their visit, not including entry tickets and audio guide purchases.[127] However, ticket sales were never going to offset the costs related to the collection. While the hotel-casino-resort was under construction the cost of the art museum was already concerning Wall Street investors. In 2000 it was revealed that while the dolphins at the Mirage had cost the equivalent of $3.70 per patron, the BGFA had cost the equivalent of $4.75 per patron.[128] The amount of revenue generated through the BGFA must have been dwarfed by that generated through gaming, restaurants, room rentals or other forms of entertainment and when compared to the cost of amassing the collection, often stated as $300 million,[129] Wynn could not have expected to recoup the capital outlay on the collection through directly earned income. A survey by the Association of Art Museum Directors in the US in 1991 calculated that about 17.5% of the participating museums' income came from earnings which also included ticket sales, shops and restaurants,[130] and there is no reason to believe that this figure was substantially greater at the BGFA.

However, the presence of an authentic art museum in the Bellagio was intended, as admitted by Wynn, to confer "a certain degree of distinction".[131] As observed by some of the journalists that wrote about the opening of the casino, the BGFA was a way to distinguish the casino from its rivals. James Twitchell's concept of opuluxe, discussed above, explains how ideals of luxury have

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126 Kimmelman, Michael, In An Unreal City, Real Masterworks Beat the Odds, The New York Times, 6 December 1998
127 Las Vegas Sun, 11 June 1999
128 Binkley, Christina, *Winner Takes All: Steve Wynn, Kirk Kerkorian, Gary Loveman and the race to own Las Vegas,* New York, Hyperion, 2008, p.91
129 How Las Vegas Got the Culture Bug, Daily Mail, 15 November 1998
130 Rossett, Richard, Art Museums in the United States: A Financial Portrait, ed. Feldstein, Martin, *The Economics of Art Museums,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991
131 Lumpkin, 1998, p. 10

become utilised as part of tourist sites' offerings to produce experiences that seem be special and unique but are in fact easily replicable and commonly available. However, the luxury proposed by the BGFA was, despite Wynn's bombastic assertions, subtle and complex. To succeed as luxury there must be a conjunction of novelty and refinement.[132] At the BGFA this can be seen through the interplay between the 'surprise' in finding an art museum in a casino and the adoption of mainstream art engagement ideals. Thus, the BGFA offered a novel example of an art museum but one that refined existing values rather than rejected them. This process requires increasingly subtle judgements from which cultural capital emerges. It is no longer sufficient to recognise forms, elements or contexts, one must recognise them as being in some ways authentic rather than replicated and to understand at the same time the ways that these might be different. There must be something sufficiently novel for the connoisseurs while being sufficiently conventional for popular taste. This form of double coding sought to position the BGFA as both popular and legitimate at the same time.

Nevertheless, the adoption of signifiers derived from mainstream art museums authenticated the BGFA only for those that could recognise these signifiers. The Gallery, as created by Wynn, could therefore never truly be a way to communicate to a broad range of people who were not interested in art because it depended on visitors' understanding its adoption of symbolic cultural capital. While adhering to expected ideals of the art museum could be folded into the tourist offering, by its very nature, this would not be recognised by people that had no previous experiences of art museums. However, the reasoning behind this form of populism was revealed in the catalogue when Wynn writes that attendance at art museums has exceeded attendance at sporting events.[133] Hence, Wynn believed that art museums were already sufficiently popular to ensure that enough people would be able to read the museum's cultural signifiers. The BGFA was not, therefore, offering something new but something recognisable, and Wynn was 'betting'

[132] Armitage, John, Critical Luxury Studies: Art, Design, Media, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016
[133] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 9

that sufficient Las Vegas visitors were familiar with it. As with most casino bets, the house always wins. In 1998, the majority of those who visited Las Vegas were middle income, 30-40 year olds with college (university) educations.[134] This demographic correlates with research undertaken on the constituency of museum goers.[135] As with more established art museums, the rhetoric of populism adopted by the BGFA concealed the reality, which was that it was intended to speak to much the same sorts of people who were already attending art museums in other parts of the country.

The public display of the collection in a specially created art museum also conferred distinction on Wynn. He made no secret in interviews that he saw amassing the collection as a personal undertaking that reflected his own tastes and character. In a television interview he was asked how he had selected the works in the BGFA. He replied:

> "These are my favourites. I've always loved Impressionism, so I started at the end of the last century ….. But once I got into Impressionism, I bought a painting by Pablo Picasso that caught my fancy. To say it caught my fancy is a bit of an understatement. It started to haunt me and it changed my taste in art. And Pablo Picasso, just as he had done to everyone, jerked me into the 20th Century and changed my taste in art."[136]

Collectors opening their own art museums are by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, the catalogue expressly likens Wynn's collection to that of Henry Clay Frick and his museum in New York, perhaps one of the best known examples of what Anne Higonnet has called a "museum of one's own."[137]

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[134] Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority and GLS Research, *Las Vegas Visitor Profile: Calendar Year 2009: Annual Report,* December 2009, accessed on-line 29/09/10, p.14
http://www.lvcva.com/getfile/107/2009%20Las%20Vegas%20Visitor%20Profile.pdf
[135] National Endowment for the Arts: *US Patterns of Arts Participation,* December 2019
[136] Steve Wynn interview with Rikki Cheese, KTNV, 1998:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=TMhlKWT4_oc&feature=endscreen – accessed 6/2016
[137] Higonnet, Anne, *A Museum of One's Own*, New York, Periscope Publishing, 2009

Wynn is very much a presence in the catalogue, providing the Forward and an essay on a Warhol screen print of himself and he is also mentioned frequently in the Introduction as well as in numerous essays. Wynn also narrated the audio guide, so people that did not purchase a copy of the catalogue might still have encountered him during their visit. In the Editor's Note, curator Libby Lumpkin heaps praise on Wynn for providing "scholarship and stewardship,"[138] while Peter Schjeldahl asserts that only someone with "wealth and will" could create the BGFA.[139] According to the catalogue Wynn is a man whose wealth, discernment and drive set him apart from other people and enabled him to create something unique. The catalogue therefore played a role in sustaining and developing Wynn's public image. The collection, the catalogue and the casino were conflated with the public image of Steve Wynn and for his next casino project he would take this to its logical conclusion, eschewing any kind of descriptive name and simply calling it The Wynn.

Although the concept of having an art museum in the Bellagio was Wynn's, and it may have boosted Wynn's image to infer that he had $300 million to spend on art, the reality was that he was not personally able to access this large sum. However, he was sufficiently committed to building a collection of the highest quality possible that he liquidated a large part of his own stock in the company in order to raise capital for art. Nevertheless, he was still forced to either borrow money from Mirage Resorts, or buy art on behalf of the company, to make up the difference. Due to the confidential nature of the art world, it may never be possible to untangle the threads of on whose behalf Wynn was purchasing the art works. It was later estimated that Wynn owned about $125 million worth of the collection with the company owning the rest, although which works fell into which 'pot' was never clear.[140] It may well have been that, for Wynn, there was no difference between his personal transactions and those of the company

[138] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 11
[139] Lumpkin, 1998, p. 13
[140] Binkley, Christina, *Winner Takes All: Steve Wynn, Kirk Kerkorian, Gary Loveman and the race to own Las Vegas,* New York, Hyperion, 2008, p.92

which he founded and ran. Indeed, when Mirage Resorts was bought by MGM Grand, Wynn negotiated to keep the lions-share of the collection. The ownership of the works on view may have had no bearing on the experiences of the visitors to the BGFA, however, the presence of Wynn, as collector, business-man, designer and driving force behind the Gallery, was intended to confer 'distinction' on him. The use of cultural philanthropy to improve the image of wealthy people and to gloss over their questionable actions is not novel. If the Wynn Collection was like the Frick Collection, then just as the catalogue to the Frick collection omits his monopolistic business practices, so too does the catalogue for the BGFA omit discussion of the uses to which Wynn put his collection in the pursuit of profit.

The social hierarchies that are created and supported by the use of cultural capital as a form of distinction are, for Bourdieu, part of a system of symbolic power which underpins social systems of hierarchy and domination. For Bourdieu power is not a separate area of study but stands at the heart of all social life. Moreover, the successful exercise of power requires legitimation, that is the universal acceptance it is not only normal but the correct social behaviour.[141] Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure. The main way this happens is through habitus (socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking).[142] The adoption of legitimising elements at the BGFA, therefore, was not only a tactic to encourage tourist visitation but had wider implications in terms of struggles over valued, but symbolic, capital, that were being used to pursue strategies to achieve specific interests and actual capital. The philanthropic image of Wynn as provider of fine art to tourists and the city of Las Vegas was, therefore, also interwoven with Wynn's financial and political positioning for power, something that could not be acknowledged in the Gallery itself.

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[141] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art,* London, Polity Press, 1996

[142] Wacquant, Lois, Habitus. International Encyclopaedia of Economic Sociology. J. Becket and Z. Milan. London, Routledge, 2005, p. 315

In 1997 Wynn sponsored and promoted a change to Nevada state law that reduced the state's sales tax on major art works from 7.5% to 2% if they were publicly displayed.[143] Major works of art were also exempted entirely from the state's 1% personal property tax. According to the law, purchasers of art valued at over $25,000, and thus classed officially as 'masterpieces', were eligible to the exemption if they displayed their works to the public for at least 20 hours a week for 35 weeks a year. It was reported that this tax break would amount to $18 million a year for Wynn.[144] However, prior to the opening of the Bellagio, Wynn was again in court, this time to contest the state's ruling that in order to qualify for the tax exemption, works should be available to view free of charge. Although the decision initially went against him, by the time the BGFA opened there was an admission charge. There was strong opposition to the sales tax reduction and to the subsequent decision to offer a tax break while allowing admission charging. However, Wynn portrayed his attempt to change the tax laws as a move to encourage art in Las Vegas and as such it was eventually passed. The utilisation of cultural capital, Wynn's Collection, to gain economic capital was presented as the provision of art engagement 'for all,' an undertaking for an art museum that is widely seen as a legitimate goal.

As well as achieving tax breaks through public display, Wynn also registered as an art dealer. Under Nevada law it is possible to buy goods from outside of the state and hold them as inventory in Nevada without being assessed for sales and use tax. Therefore, as a registered dealer, he could avoid the reduced sales tax altogether as well as sidestepping any requirements on how to exhibit his collection. Furthermore, as well as reducing his tax exposure on his collection, in 1998 Mirage Resorts and Wynn reached an agreement whereby the company agreed to pay him $4.8 million a year to lease the art that he personally owned. The company also agreed to pay him all the revenues generated from ticket sales, retails sales and merchandising

[143] Las Vegas Sun, 5 October 1997
[144] Las Vegas Sun, 7 October 1998

agreements after expenses. They also agreed to meet all the costs of insurance.[145] Therefore, as well as paying virtually no tax on his collection, it was also making him money and he was not paying for any of the associated costs. He need not, therefore, have relied on tickets sales alone for his Gallery to turn a profit. If the BGFA encouraged people to visit the casino his company would benefit and so, therefore, would he.

The BGFA, therefore, served interests beyond acting as a tourist attraction as Wynn used his political influence and huge wealth to hire lawyers and lobbyists to change laws in his favour for financial gain. Local government in Las Vegas is notoriously weak and prone to support the private sector and the tourist industry in particular. Wynn is renowned for using his financial resources to influence local politics through making campaign donations as well as operating a kind of electoral campaign headquarters by influencing voters through telephone campaigns, all of which has made him very influential with local politicians of both parties.[146] In 1997 the Mirage gave $240,000 to the local Democratic Party and $301,771 to the local Republican Party. In that same year Wynn hosted a fundraiser for the Republican Party at his home in Shadow Creek which raised $100,000.[147] This has led to criticism of Wynn and other casino moguls for undermining the democratic process though the use of their wealth and influence.[148] Indeed, after the election of Donald Trump as President to the US in 2017, Wynn used his contacts and reputation to raise over $100 million for his inauguration committee.[149]

In one major regard, the BGFA differed markedly from other art museums in that, as was widely reported at the time, all the works in the collection were for sale. In December 1998 Michael

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145 Binkley, Christina, *Winner Takes All: Steve Wynn, Kirk Kerkorian, Gary Loveman and the race to own Las Vegas,* New York, Hyperion, 2008

146 Schmid, Heiko, *Economy of Fascination: Dubai and Las Vegas as Themed Urban Landscapes*, Berlin, Gebruder Borntraeger, 2009, p. 134

147 Palermo, David, Success, Controversy Follow Mirage Resorts Chairman, Knight-Ridder Tribune Business News, 7 March 1999

148 Denton, Sally and Morris, Roger, *The Money and the Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America* 1947 – 2000, London, Random House, 2001

149 Saunders, Debra, Donald Trump and Steve Wynn evolved from rivals to friends, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 30 January 2018

Kimmelman reported in the New York Times that on his first visit to the BGFA he had seen Brancusi's Mademoiselle Pogany, as well as Giacometti's Man Pointing and Franz Kline's August Day, but the following day when he returned they were no longer available to view as they had been sold.[150] Thus within three months of the opening of the Bellagio and the BGFA, the collection had changed and the catalogue was no longer up to date. By the time Wynn sold the Bellagio in 2000 he had added works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Michelangelo and Titian to the collection. The fluid nature of the collection was confirmed by Wynn to the Las Vegas Sun in June 1999 when he said: "We're constantly upgrading the collection through selling, buying and trading. The idea is to have the best possible pictures, pictures that are great examples of masterworks from every century".[151]

Most US art museums have acquisition strategies and deaccessioning guidelines. While it is assumed that the works on the wall are not for sale if they are owned by the art museum, there are many works which are on loan which are subsequently sold. Miro's 'Dialogue of Insects' is such a work, as it was loaned to Tate in London in 1990 from the Berggruen Collection. Although purchase prices of the artworks in the collection are not mentioned in the BGFA catalogue, they were reported in the press. There was extensive media coverage of Steve Wynn's art purchases in US newspapers such as the New York Times[152] and The Las Vegas Sun[153] prior to the opening of the Bellagio. The New York Times reported that Wynn spent $12 million for Degas's Dancer, Taking a Bow, $7.35 million for Giacometti's Pointing Man and for Matisse's Still Life With Anemones, Lemon and Pineapple $4.5 million.[154] However, despite extensive media interest, the BGFA catalogue does not mention the financial aspects of the paintings. Like

[150] Kimmelman, Michael, In An Unreal City, Real Masterworks Beat the Odds, The New York Times, 6 December 1998
[151] Las Vegas Sun, 9 June 1999
[152] Vogel, Carol, New York Times, 10 April 1998
[153] Thompson, Las Vegas Sun, 15 October 1998
[154] Vogel, Carol, New York Times, 10 April 1998

most mainstream art museum catalogues, it avoided reference to the art market and to money in general.

It would be a very unusual catalogue that included information about a work of art's purchase price or the tax arrangements put in place by its owner. In this, the BGFA catalogue follows the practice of traditional collections and exhibition catalogues in not mentioning purchase prices, or indeed the art market, except when discussing a particular artist's dealer. Unlike a sale catalogue, a collection or exhibition catalogue does not usually give details of provenance meaning that previous owners are not acknowledged but also that the process by which works of art pass from one owner to another, that is the art market, is also not acknowledged. A catalogue of a permanent collection might refer to the donors of a work of art but it would not mention the original purchase price or, in the US, the tax-breaks that resulted from the donation. Art museums have developed to ignore the role played by them, and the effect on them, of the commercial art market.[155] For art museums the economic power of works of art, and often of those who collect them, is rarely addressed directly despite sustained attempts at institutional critique by artists such as Hans Haacke or the Guerrilla Girls. Whether an art museum conceptualised the visiting experience as personal and aesthetic, didactic and social or as part of a larger entertainment offering, the ignoring of these factors is justified as part of their approach. This element of the commodified world remains firmly excluded from the ways that art museums interpret the works that they display.

The history of the establishment of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, therefore involves financial and political considerations, as indeed, do the histories of all art museums. Wynn's wealth enabled him to accrue political influence, to buy expensive legal advice and to pursue his goals

[155] See for instance, Wu, Chin-Tao, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980's,* London, Verso, 2002 for a discussion on UK institutions, and Alexander, D. Victoria, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship and Management,* Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1996 and Einreinhofer, Nancy, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, London, Leicester University Press, 1997 for discussions on US institutions.

even if this entailed changing state laws. Wynn's objectives in this regard were purely financial and despite his claims that they would benefit the city, largely focused on his own financial benefit. Art museums in the US operate as part of the capitalist economy and must find methods of accruing financial capital for wages, capital projects, restoration and preservation and acquisitions amongst other things. Trustees, donors and sponsors frequently have financial goals as well as altruistic ones and art museums often knowingly aid these stakeholders to achieve these goals. Accusations levelled at art museums such as those by the Occupy Museums movement, claim that they are elitist and exclusive and are servicing the interests of the wealthiest rather than other sections in society.[156] These are accusation that absorb the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and the New Museology and, as discussed in the Introduction, still inform academic critiques of museums. In the case of the BGFA, the focus on an aesthetically disinterested engagement with the works on view served to deliberately mask the political, financial and social implications and actions of the gallery. The utilisation of aspect of the idealised art museum as part of a wider leisure complex at the Bellagio did not substantially challenge relationships between the BGFA and its imagined publics.

8. Conclusion

The Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art closed in 2000 when ownership of the casino and the rest of the company passed from Wynn's Mirage Resorts to Kirk Kerkorian's MGM Grand. The takeover of Mirage Resorts was a move prompted by Kerkorian's belief that the company's shares were undervalued, in part because of negative shareholder sentiment resulting from Wynn's profligate spending on art at the Bellagio. As well as a generous personal settlement, which allowed him and his family to undergo expensive plastic surgery, Wynn negotiated the retention of the

[156] Fischer, Noah, The Gothamist, 2011
http://gothamist.com/2011/10/20/occupy_wall_streets_art_and_culture.php - accessed 6/12

majority of the art collection.[157] The original BGFA that exhibited Wynn's collection closed not because it failed in its goals. Indeed, as we have seen it was very popular. Its closure was because of financial considerations that were far outside the scope or powers of the art museum to influence.

Wynn's next hotel-casino-resort was initially intended to be called La Reve after a painting by Picasso he had purchased in 2001 for a reported $60 million. However, it was thought that the French name would be confusing for American tourists and in the end the casino was simply called The Wynn. Wynn would eventually sell the painting to hedge fund manager Stephen Cohen for $155 million, the most ever paid at that time for an artwork by an American collector.[158] Wynn had intended to exhibit his collection at The Wynn and, for a short time, visitors could see some of the collection there.[159] However, it was decided, for reasons that have not been made public, not to show the collection at the Wynn, and much of it has now been sold. The possibility of art playing a central role in a casino was not easily abandoned by Wynn, although the financial capital of the paintings in the end was perhaps easier to accrue than their cultural capital and he finally decided that he could present a luxury casino experience without an art collection.

Meanwhile, the MGM Grand outsourced the running of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art to PaperBall, a subsidiary of Pace, and it is currently run as a kunsthalle. Pace are one of the largest contemporary art dealers in the United States.[160] Its first exhibition was of works from the Phillips Collection, followed by works from the collection of actor Steve Martin, and then a controversial tie-in with the Museum of Fine Arts Boston to exhibit some of their Monet works. The function envisaged by Wynn for the Gallery, as an attraction to draw in tourists, remains.

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[157] Binkley, Christina, *Winner Takes All: Steve Wynn, Kirk Kerkorian, Gary Loveman, and the Race to Own Las Vegas, Hyperion,* New York, 2008
[158] Clancy, Rebecca, Billionaire Steve Cohen Pays $155m for Picasso's La Reve, 27 March 2013
[159] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas ,University of Nevada Press, 2000
[160] Ibid.

However, the BGFA no longer plays a role in defining the image of the casino, which is now best known for its restaurants, swimming pools and fountains.

This chapter has used a historically based textual analysis of interpretative material at the BGFA, specifically in the catalogue, to reveal the ways in which the BGFA communicated its authentic nature and then used ideals of authenticity as a form of symbolic cultural capital in a tourist setting. The interpretation in the catalogue was important as it formed the basis for other elements of interpretation at the Gallery such as the audio guide and the introductory flyer, and acted as a manifesto for the intentions of the Gallery's owner Steve Wynn. The catalogue was distributed to journalists and therefore was used as the basis for news reports on the BGFA. As such its contents were disseminated beyond those that purchased the catalogue during their visit and mediated the ways in which the Gallery was presented to its publics. It provides a way to understand the messages that the institution and Steve Wynn wished to convey to visitors about itself.

Major long-established art museums do not need to prove that they are authentic museums in the way that the BGFA did. However, the location of the BGFA in Las Vegas, and within a casino, pushed questions of authenticity to the fore. The history and influence of major art museums such as the Louvre, the National Gallery in London or the Guggenheim in New York, mean that these institutions are never accused of being fake, even if there is debate over some of their activities. However, museums confer on themselves the authority to define their own authenticity, the authenticity of the objects within, and thereby what constitutes genuine aesthetic experiences. For instance, one is rarely encouraged to laugh in an art museum, even if the works themselves are supposed to be funny. Phillipe de Montebello, while Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, confessed in 1997 to a "shudder of unease" whenever he heard museums described as places of entertainment.[161] Museum enjoyment, therefore, is "a moment of

[161] The Importance of Being Elitist, The New Yorker, 24 November 1997

epiphany,"[162] not a good joke; life changing perhaps but not necessarily amusing. The art museums' ideals of suitable aesthetic encounters, largely in opposition to leisure activities, have become the standard by which authentic experiences are interpreted for visitors. Hence, what an art museum says about aesthetic experiences defines itself as well as attempting to define visitor experiences.

The authenticity of the BGFA as an art museum was derived from the authenticity of the works on view, which was publicly expressed through the ways in which the paintings were interpreted for visitors. However, it was not only the genuine nature of the works that was important but also the authentic behaviours of the institution. The accrual of cultural capital by the casino, through the creation of a genuine art museum, was only possible through the adoption and deployment of widely understood museum signifiers. In effect, the works were authentic and the museum was authentic therefore the experience of visiting could be understood as being in some way authentic. In a city renowned for reproductions, kitsch and post-modern fakes, the authenticity of the art museum was not a given. Indeed, the very concept of authenticity has been challenged by the city. In a city with no structural legitimacy for cultural organisations, the authenticity of the BGFA was proved through its isomorphism. The luxury nature of the casino's theme could only be confirmed through the provision of an art museum experience that was intended to be perceived as genuine.

There is no commonly accepted definition of authenticity in tourist experiences, although it is understood as a subjective and continuously evolving concept.[163] Tourists are able to understand an experience as genuine through recognising its authenticity, or understand it through existing beliefs or finally through a personalised sense of reality. [164] These three approaches to tourist authenticity are similar to, although not the same as, Bourdieu's three elements that allow for

[162] Cuno, James ed., *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 185
[163] Macleod, Nikki, Cultural Tourism: Aspects of Authenticity and Commodification, in ed. Smith, Melanie and Robinson, Mike, *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World,* Clevedon, Channel View Publications, 2005
[164] Wang, Ning, Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience, Annals of Tourism Research, Col. 26 No.2, 1999

distinction: cultural capital, habitus and field. At the BGFA, with regard to tourist experiences, the issue was not whether there was a definable authenticity, but that those that visited could relate to it either through understandings of the genuine nature of the paintings, through their own understandings of authenticity at museums or shared understandings of the concept. Therefore, the interpretation of the collection provided visitors with ways to connect their understandings of museum authenticity with the BGFA and to align their tourist experiences with those at the Gallery.

The production of a catalogue, the authorship of essays by academics, art historians and writers of international reputation, and the presentation of aesthetic engagements as transcendent and disinterested, while at the same time universal, all asserted the authenticity of the works in the collection and hence of the BGFA. The interpretation of the collection emphasised aesthetic encounters that "call on our abilities to feel and imagine, not to think" and require "a suspension of intellect in sheerly beholding".[165] Furthermore, the Gallery's interpretation promoted a disinterested aesthetic engagement that was recognisable as part of mainstream art museum discourse. The modernist, Greenburgian, approach to aesthetic encounters would have been familiar to those that had visited other museums of art.

Pierre Bourdieu describes a situation whereby art museums claim to be speaking to 'the people' through the presentation of aesthetic engagements as universal, disinterested and transcendental, while in fact creating barriers that deter many sections of society.[166] However, the BGFA knowingly used these symbolic barriers not to deter people but to present the Gallery, and the casino, as a luxury destination that could be enjoyed by 'everyone' and the interpretation of the museum-going experience was crucial to this process. The ideal of 'everyone' at the Bellagio was in reality no more universal that the ideal of 'everyone' at art museums. Nevertheless, it was presented as a form of democratic access beyond what 'normal' art museums are capable of. In

[165] Lumpkin, 1988, p. 15
[166] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010

the tourist context, the BGFA drew attention to the distinction that it conveyed to the casino and to visitors, as part of the reason for visiting. Through focusing on offering disinterested and transcendent aesthetic engagements the BGFA attempted to be both an attraction, that is a site that offers tourist experiences, and an authentic art museum, that is a site that offered genuine aesthetic encounters. The BGFA used legitimising signifiers around the aesthetic experiences proposed in its interpretive script for populist commercial tourist purposes. Concepts of what constitutes legitimate or populist activities at art museums were bent until the two blurred into each other becoming not two ends of a spectrum but supporting elements in a single strategy.

The interpretation at the BGFA was a means to influence the ways in which visitors understood their engagements with works of art. This process was folded into a tourist offering that required ideals of authenticity to function. The Gallery took the 'museum-ness' associated with a specific way of interpreting works of art, and utilised this as part of the tourist gaze, offering people the experiences that they expected to have. It was through the use of recognisable museum signifiers around interpretation that the Gallery proved its authenticity to become a tourist attraction and sought to short-circuited the legitimization/popularisation dichotomy and be both popular and genuine.

As this case study suggests, the brief life of Wynn's BGFA problematises ideals of the legitimate and popularising functions and actions by showing that the two concepts were not antagonistic to each other but were interwoven. Rather than producing a hybrid that was neither one thing or the other it was the clear presentation of legitimate art museum signifiers that allowed for the institution to function as a populist site. Although the BGFA did not work towards goals that are thought of as natural for art museums, its approach to aesthetic engagement was very much part of fundamental understandings of how people react to works of art. At the BGFA they were not two sides of the same coin but are rather the inextricably combined elements that make up the coin. Interpretation can be used to inform but can also be used to influence. The insistence on

disinterested, visceral and transcendent reactions to the paintings served to decontextualise the engagement, which in turn authenticated the experience, providing tourists with the kinds of experiences that are deliberately separate from the everyday. A visit to the BGFA was presented as enabling people to both figuratively and literally 'get away from it all'. This interweaving of symbolic cultural signifiers whereby a casino and an art museum can work in synergy proved successful at the Bellagio. Art museums are not like casinos, however, as seen at the BGFA, they need not be the opposite of them either. The interpretation at the BGFA was a vital part of the creation of the museum's image and was focused on influencing the ways that visitors thought about the institution and the collection. In the next chapter, the experiences of another art museum in another casino will be examined and its main channel of communication analysed to understand its relationship to ideals of museum authenticity and to its host.

Chapter 2:

Essentially real: Architectures of authenticity at the Guggenheim Las Vegas

1. Introduction: What we promise is authenticity

In October 2000 the Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation announced that they were entering into a partnership to open two new art museum spaces at the resort, designed by Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas.[1] The decision to exhibit art in the Venetian was influenced by the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art's success in attracting visitors and in generating publicity.[2] While the BGFA did not introduce art to Las Vegas, it introduced the possibility that art museums could become part of the city's casino offerings. Furthermore, as we have seen in the previous Chapter, the BGFA successfully presented itself as a genuine art institution that exhibited genuine works of art, offering recognisably authentic aesthetic experiences. At the BGFA interpretation was mobilised to influence how visitors thought about and experienced the works of art they viewed. However, at the Guggenheim Las Vegas the experiences of visitors were intended to be influenced through the physical manifestation of an art museum. This Chapter will look at the experience of the Guggenheim in Las Vegas, and specifically how it used architecture to communicate authenticity against the supposed inauthenticity of its host, the Venetian.

Sheldon Adelson, the owner of the Venetian and Steve Wynn were bitter rivals, with Adelson describing Wynn as a "liar" and an "egomaniac", while Wynn has referred to Adelson as having "an inferiority complex".[3] The new art museum, therefore, was always likely to be larger and more ambitious than the BGFA as the casino moguls vied for superiority. Yet similar processes of isomorphic legitimisation were at work in both casino galleries. The adoption of recognisable cultural capital signifiers, in the case of the Guggenheim including architectural forms, was

[1] Press Release, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 20 October 2000
[2] Hangings in the Wild West: Two of America's hottest curators are putting Las Vegas on the cultural map, The Economist, 2 August 2001
[3] Bertoni, Steve, Billionaire Rivals, Forbes Magazine, 8 December 2009

intended to legitimize the institutions in their casino contexts. At the Guggenheims the process of legitimization was used as part of a carefully scripted tourist experience which was intended to influence the actions of visitors through the creation of symbolic stages on which to perform. At the Guggenheim in Las Vegas the authenticity of the institution was communicated by the legitimising environment in which the objects were shown,. This Chapter will look at how, for a museum with no permanent collection, symbolic, architectural, museum signifiers were used to create spaces that could be recognised as being legitimately of the art museum to authenticate the institution and suggest a transcended experience of visiting, and furthermore, how these spaces related conceptually and practically to the casino around them.

There were two separate spaces at the Venetian. The Guggenheim Las Vegas was a huge space nicknamed the Big Box by its architect, Rem Koolhaas, that was intended to show contemporary art, while the Guggenheim Hermitage, nicknamed the Jewel Box, was a smaller space which would show works from the Guggenheim's collection of modern art as well as older works from the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, which was also a partner in the enterprise. Neither space was housed in a separate structure. The BGFA was a physically small space, conceived and built as part of the Bellagio resort. Architecture could not be a means of communication for the BGFA as it had no unique architectural character. In contrast, the Guggenheim spaces were 'inserted' into the already existing Venetian resort rather than being integral parts of the original design.[4] As the Guggenheim spaces were conceived of as kunsthalles, without their own collections, their architecture was intended to be a permanent feature in Las Vegas, unlike the works in the temporary exhibitions that were shown there. According to Thomas Krens, then director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, it was the opportunity to make an architectural statement in Las Vegas that was a deciding factor in persuading the Guggenheim to

[4] Koolhaas, Rem, Artforum, Summer 2010, p. 287

go there.[5] The architecture, therefore, was expected to be the primary framing mechanism for the engagement with the art museum. Each space had its own characteristics and this will enable this case study to look at two types of museum architecture, large-scale and bombastic, and small-scale and personal, and ask how these related to ideals of authenticity.

It is not only the inherent authenticity of a thing that guarantees it, but also its relationship to its opposite – that is something that is inauthentic.[6] The experience of going to a museum can be presented as more authentic than that of a circus show because it can be understood as occurring in opposition to something that is inauthentic. Although both are clearly real in the sense that they exist, one is held to represent some form of integrity while the other represents something that may be considered to have no integral authenticity.[7] Inauthenticity is a state of unreality or dishonesty, where things are not what they purport to be, such as a replica of Venice. The authenticity of experiences, objects and institutions can be understood through the ways in which these contrast with things that are perceived as fake. As we will see below, the architecture of the Guggenheim spaces in the Venetian exaggerated the differences between themselves and the casino in order to assert their authenticity in relation to the supposedly 'inauthentic' casino. However, in Las Vegas the messages conveyed by casino architecture have bene described as genuine because they are easy to understand and shorn of pretention. Both types of structure can be read as authentic and inauthentic.

The new museum had ambitious aspirations. Peter Lewis, chairman of the Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation stated that by opening in Las Vegas, they were "reinventing the museum for the 21st Century".[8] According to Krens the goal of the Guggenheim in Las Vegas

[5] Farquharson, Alex ed., *The Magic Hour – The Convergence of Art and Las Vegas*, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 2001, p. 102
[6] Maleuvre, Didier, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art,* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999
[7] Rugoff, Ralph, *Circus Americanus,* London, Verso, 1995, p. 3
[8] Press Release Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 20 October 2000

was to reach "the widest possible audience".[9] It was claimed that the architecture of the spaces would break down the authority of the 'traditional' art museum through offering art to a wider demographic as, according to Koolhaas, "the only reason to withhold culture from Las Vegas is extreme cultural snobbery".[10] The location of the Guggenheims in a casino in Vegas was presented as a way to bring art to a wider range of people and push at the boundaries and expectations of the goals of art museums. As expressed by Krens "When you are in the missionary business, you go where the heathens are".[11] In this way its establishment foregrounded issues of popularity and legitimisation.

The BGFA showed a single collection belonging to a Las Vegas resident (and casino mogul), and therefore, references were made throughout the BGFA catalogue to the gallery's location in the city and visitors were reminded that not only was the collection exhibited in a casino but that the casino was in Las Vegas (of all places!).[12] That the Bellagio collection was related to the city was recognised and was part of the interpretation at the BGFA. The interpretation of the collection acknowledged that the kinds of aesthetic engagements the Gallery was hoping to engender in visitors could be understood as part of those offered in a tourist setting, albeit allegedly superior. However, the exhibitions in both Guggenheim Las Vegas spaces were organised and curated outside of the city. The involvement of the Guggenheim, the Hermitage and sometimes the Kunsthistoriches Museum in Vienna, meant that written interpretation, such as catalogues and labels, were prepared elsewhere, often in New York, and sent to Vegas with the exhibitions.[13] Unlike the BGFA, where the interpretation was specifically prepared for the gallery, the Guggenheim's interpretation rarely mentioned or acknowledged the city and half of the eleven

[9] Masterpieces and Master Collectors: Impressionist and Modern Paintings from The Hermitage and Guggenheim Museums, September 16 2001 – March 17 2002 Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2001, p.11
[10] Goodale, Gloria, Art Movement: Guggenheim has Extended its Tentacles to Las Vegas. Is It and Art 'Franchise' in the Making?, in *The Christian Science Monitor,* 19 October 2001
[11] Glancey, Jonathan, Art the Showbiz Years, The Guardian, 8 October 2001
[12] Lumpkin, p. 10
[13] Plaza, B and Haarich, S, A, Guggenheim-Hermitage Museum as an economic engine? Some preliminary ingredients for its effectiveness, Transformations in Business & Economics, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (20), 2010, p.133

exhibitions held there (one in the Big Box and ten in the Jewel Box) were also shown elsewhere. The primary way in which the Guggenheim related to the city and to the casinos was not through interpretation.

The edifices or architecture of art museums have always been recognised as the physical manifestation of the functions and intentions of the institution, and museum architecture has long been acknowledged as influencing the ways in which people behave and experience their visits. Therefore, the vocabularies of museum architecture express in physical form assumptions not only about aesthetic contemplation but also about the ways that this should be manifested in the behaviours of visitors. The Guggenheims in Vegas used their architecture to separate themselves, physically and conceptually, from casino architecture and the ways in which this is understood. However, while the interpretation at the BGFA sought to communicate an authentic museum-going experience that folded into the other attractions at the casino, the Guggenheim used its architecture to communicate an authenticity that emphasised its difference and opposition to the casinos. Its version of authenticity relied on understandings of legitimate 'museum-ness' that were in opposition to delegitimising popularity.

This Chapter uses a historically based textual analysis of written and visual elements. As linguist Michael O'Toole has proposed, architecture, both old and new, can be read as a vital element in the dialogue between the art museum and audiences.[14] Architecture can be read in a way that is analogous to the reading of language as, "the way distinct architectural components are combined to make a coherent whole, that is to say, an important dimension of the meaning … is in the composition".[15] Through reading the different elements of architecture as a 'text' it is possible to decode the messages, explicit or otherwise, that are transmitted by the structure. Therefore, while the functionality of a building is important, there are other modes of meaning at

[14] O'Toole, Michael, *The Language of Displayed Art,* London, Continuum Publishing, 1994
[15] O'Toole, Michael, Opera Ludentes: the Sydney Opera House at work and play, in O'Halloran, Kay, *Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic Functional Perspectives*, London, Continuum, 2004, P.11

play. A church would not be expected to share design features with a power station and it is these differences that enable the visitor to 'read' the architecture in such a way that informs them of the genuine purpose of the structure. Even where the purpose of buildings has changed, such as at Tate Modern, features delineating the new function of the building are introduced so that the previous function can be seen to be superseded. In this way the authentic nature of the building is communicated, thus informing visitors of the supposedly genuine nature of their experiences.

Unlike older, more established museums of art, which still inhabit the buildings originally built to house them, the traces of the Guggenheims in Vegas have been effaced and the messages of the structures must be read through other traces. The Guggenheim spaces have been completely remodelled since the art museum left the city and no physical traces remain. Therefore, photographs and images of the spaces from the architects OMA, the Guggenheim Foundation and other sources such architect Larry Speck's photography resource have been used to 'reconstruct' the museum. Through these images the architecture of the Guggenheim Las Vegas spaces will be analysed like a written text to understand which elements were used and how these related to ideals of authenticity derived from museum isomorphism.

Archival material from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York relating to its excursion in Las Vegas has also formed an important element in the case study. Without material available from the Venetian Resort, the Guggenheim's archive is the primary source of archival material relating to the art museum. This material consists largely of press releases and other documents prepared for public release and shows how the Guggenheim was specifically focused on the architecture of the new galleries. Press reports, in particular in the architectural press, have also been used. Finally, the Guggenheims have been put in the context of their host, the Venetian and the city more widely, as well as the Guggenheim's expansions in other countries.

This case study builds on the previous Chapter, by examining the ways that the edifices of the Guggenheim in the Venetian confirmed the authenticity of the institution and the experiences within through the use of legitimising signifiers. At the BGFA the interpretation presented to visitor sought to influence how they thought about the experience of engaging with works of art. At the Guggenheim, the architecture sought to influence how visitors behaved in the physical space through encouraging transcendent experiences. However, where the BGFA attempted to remould ideals of authenticity so that its 'museum-ness' became a necessary part of a tourist attraction, the Guggenheims presented an authenticity that emphasised binary understandings of legitimisation and popularisation. In this Chapter we will explore some of the issues around ideals of authenticity at art museums, specifically some of the articulations and silences that relate to the corporeality of museum architecture. It will ask how the architecture of the Guggenheims conformed to ideals of a binary opposition between legitimacy and populism and how this was used by both institutions. The academic and professional reticence to discuss issues of authenticity in art museum architecture will be balanced by the important role that this issue plays in discussions of Las Vegas. Through an analysis of the architecture of both Guggenheim spaces, comparisons to the Venetian and references to public statements, this Chapter will tease out the ways in which the Guggenheim used ideals of authenticity to accrue symbolic cultural capital. This Chapter will ask which structure, the casino or the art museum, could lay claim in Las Vegas to ideals of authenticity and, indeed, despite the rhetoric of both institutions, were they really as different as they liked to make out? The location of the art museum in Las Vegas, further allows for explorations of the claims to authenticity that can be made by contemporary museum architecture. If the relationship of the BGFA to ideals of legitimisation and populism at art museums can be described as an inextricable combination of the concepts, this case study is interested in how, at the Guggenheims, these concepts were symbiotic but presented as antithetical.

2. "From interpretation to experience"[16]

Although the exact nature of authenticity is debated, the ability of museum architecture to influence perceptions of authenticity of experiences at the institution, through the presentation of recognisable forms, signs and symbols that can be read, sometimes unconsciously, as suitable for museum buildings, is widely accepted.[17] If the physical structure undermines the presentation of the objects, the authenticity of the encounter is called into question, and works of art struggle to be perceived as authentic when they are displayed within locations that lack legitimacy as proper exhibition spaces.[18] At the Bellagio, when Wynn displayed works by Picasso in one of the restaurants, diners asked if they were genuine,[19] while the question of authenticity at the BGFA was intended to be answered through the authenticating signifiers at the Gallery. Without the validating surroundings of a recognisable museum building, many people might struggle to identify the genuine nature of a work of art and even within an established museum many visitors cannot spot a fake.[20] Museums, therefore, create environments in which it is possible for visitors to believe that the works on view are authentic through the authenticity of the physical environment. It is through the repeated use of architectural forms in multiple buildings that ideals of shared visual references have developed. The isomorphic tendencies of art museums are visually evident in their architecture.

As discussed in the Introduction, and seen through the BGFA case study, satisfying the 'tourist gaze' requires that expected signifiers are present in order to validate experiences[21] and

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[16] Foster, Hal, *The Architecture Complex,* London, Verso, p 119

[17] See for instance, Campelo, Adriana, and Reynolds, Laura, eds., *Cultural Heritage,* London, Routledge, 2018; Ousmanova, Almira, Fake at stake: The problem of authenticity, Problemos, No. 66, 2004; Soren, Barbara, Museum Experiences that change visitors, Museums Management and Curatorship, Vol 24 Issue 3 September 2009; Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, D eds., *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* Smithsonian Institute, 1991

[18] Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyper-reality,* London, Picador, 1986

[19] Rosenthal, Tom Picasso Plays Las Vegas, The Daily Telegraph, 28 June 1998

[20] Ellis-Petersen, Hannah, Dulwich gallery reveals fake painting among collection of old masters, The Guardian, 28 April 2015

[21] Urry, John*, The Tourist Gaze, Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London, Sage Publications, 1990

"management of the customer perception of authenticity,"[22] remains key to meeting tourist expectations of museum visiting. The expected presence of these symbols means that for heritage sites there is an institutional isomorphism that may not be possible to break out of, as we have seen at the BGFA. This process at the Guggenheim was played out against the diversification of attractions and experiences in Las Vegas that recognised the development of tourists' omnivorous cultural consumption.[23] Tourists to the city could enjoy world-class dining with internationally recognised fine wines, theatrical performances of Broadway hit musicals, and superstar pop performers, intended to meet the demands of different types of tourist experiences, and hence attracting more people. For the city of Las Vegas, this made for a confusing offering where the 'old' city of kitsch and reproductions rubbed shoulders with 'new' experiences that demanded a form of authenticity in order to be taken seriously.

It's location in Las Vegas meant that the curation of an authentic visiting experience was at least as vital a part of museum activities at the Guggenheim as the curation of the objects themselves. As the Guggenheim brought to Las Vegas its brand recognition derived from its museums in New York, Venice and Bilbao it did not need, as the BGFA did, to prove its authenticity as an institution. However, it did need to differentiate itself from the other forms of leisure and tourist activity in the city as a guarantee that it would provide a recognisably authentic engagement with the art on display. The BGFA differentiated itself from attractions at the Bellagio through presenting aesthetic encounters that were disinterested. However, it was through the offering of experiences that were separate from the everyday that the BGFA could also be an attraction as part of a tourist offering. The Guggenheim's relationship to authenticity also rested on offering recognisable and transcendent experiences, however, its architecture proposed that these came with a rejection of the populist, tourist temptations of the casino.

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[22] Pine, Joseph and Gilmore, James, Museums and Authenticity, Museums News, May/June 2007
[23] Peterson, Richard and Kern, Roger, Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore, American Sociological Review, Vol 61. No 5, 1996

The vocabularies of museum architecture express in visual form assumptions about the experience of aesthetic contemplation and the manner in which visiting publics are expected to engage with the works within. From the earliest museums to current museum buildings, the experience of museum architecture is multisensory and immersive and involves forms and textures that are intended to influence how visitors feel. The dominant style of museum architecture in the 19th Century and early 20th Century was neo-classical, such as that of the British Museum or the National Gallery of New South Wales (Fig. 1), which deliberately linked the museum-going experience with Enlightenment ideals of classification, order and learning while proclaiming an authority supposedly inherited from the ancient classical world. The call to authenticity of this type of architecture was inherently linked to borrowings of codes and symbols rather than the creation of completely novel ones. Many of the features of this style of museum building were taken from ancient Greek or Roman temples and although given a contemporary twist, largely through a vast increase in scale, openly acknowledged the original architectural sources.[24] The adoption of forms from religious buildings was intended to suggest that the visit to the museum was also a form of transcendent experience.

[24] Latham, Kim, *The Architecture of the Museum: Symbolic Structures, Urban Contexts*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003

Figure 1. The façade of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Features such as a dominant façade, usually with a classical frieze and columns, broad staircases leading up to raised entrances, domes and skylights, large atriums and the widespread use of stone are common throughout museums of this type. While exteriors echoed classical temple architecture, interiors were usually plain and neutral with no attempt to link the space to the objects on display. As neo-classical art museums frequently share many of the same forms, a vernacular understanding of the 'language' of museum architecture has developed. As so many visitors to major art museums in Europe and America are faced with similar architectural elements these have come to embody the 'authentic' art museum building.[25] Indeed a recent book entitled simply *The Art Museum* utilises a simplified design of a classical façade with pillars and a pediment to suggest all art museum buildings.[26] Furthermore, in this style of architecture

[25] Oberhardt, Susan, *Frames within frames,* New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2001
[26] Paul, Stella, ed., *The Art Museum,* New York, Phaidon, 2017

"there is little sense of individual personality in the design of the building".[27] Public reactions to these buildings were not expected to be mediated through the individualism of the architectural style but through shared understandings of the signification of the forms.

Neo-classicism remained the dominant form of museum architecture until the post-war period when modernist architects sought to deliberately subvert this tradition. Mies van der Rohe's New National Gallery in Berlin swept away the traditional classical forms of columns, arches and staircases and replaced them with glass exterior walls and wall-less interior spaces to break down the separation of the museum from the outside world and at the same time to create an interior space that enabled experiences of the objects within that attempted to bring the quotidian world into the museum. However, during the 1960s there was an increase in interest amongst architects in the relationship between the experience of visiting and encountering the works of art in isolation from the world outside. Louis Kahn's Yale Center for British Art, for instance, demonstrates a tendency for gallery interiors to be essentially abstract. This type of art museum gallery space is described by Brian O'Doherty as "limbolike," as according to him "there is no time" in this kind of art museum interior and the presence of anything except works of art is superfluous.[28] O'Doherty suggests that the development of the 'white cube' as the preeminent type of gallery interior for the display of modern works of art was, in part, an attempt to separate the works from the everyday world so that they could be contemplated apart from external influences.

The creation of spaces intended to separate viewers from the world outside the museum is the physical equivalent of modernist ideals of aesthetic engagement. Just as Clement Greenburg proposed that the most suitable way to think about a work of art was through engagement with

[27] Smith, Charles Saumarez, Architecture and the Museum, Journal of Design History, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1995, p. 244
[28] O'Doherty, Brian, *Inside The White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space,* Berkley, University of California Press, 1999, p. 15

it in a manner divorced from the lived experiences of the viewer, that is to be disinterested,[29] so too does museum architecture seek to physically remove the experience from the quotidian world. Furthermore, just as Greenburg utilised ideals of the Enlightenment in his discussions of aesthetic judgement, so too were Enlightenment ideals of museum architecture updated in modernist art museums. The presentation of art objects in spaces that are deliberately divorced from the settings for which they were made was not a radical shift as O'Doherty suggests but a continuation of the tradition of plain 19th Century neo-classical interiors, albeit with even fewer features.

The emergence in the late 20th Century of not only differing architectural styles but individual and unique approaches to designing art museums shifted the focus of the building away from being solely an appropriate receptacle for art objects towards being an expression of its designer's and the institutions aesthetic intensions. For Andrew McClellan the history of museum architecture shows the constant swings between functionalism and spectacle, or attempts to accommodate both viewpoints with varying degrees of success.[30] As art museum structures have purportedly changed from focusing on functionalism towards being about aesthetics, the role of the architect has become ever more important and, in many ways, like that of an artist.[31] The seeming triumph of the aesthetics of individual architects over the supposed functionalism of 'traditional' art museums has encouraged a view of the art museum as a "machine for looking" in the words of Hal Foster. For Foster, if a house can be a machine for living, so-described by Le Corbusier, then an art museum can also be a machine but one which seeks to encourage particular manners of looking at, or engagement with, art. The architecture of art museums, seeks to "challenge the art at its own game" whether this is desirable or not.[32]

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[29] Greenberg, Clement, Modernist Painting, in Battcock, Gregory, ed., *The New Art: A Critical Anthology,* New York, Dutton Books, 1973

[30] McClellan, Andrew, *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008

[31] Shiner, Larry, On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the 'Spectacle' Art Museum, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 69, No. 1, 2011

[32] Foster, Hal, *The Art Architecture Complex,* London, Verso p.90

Buildings such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao or Tate Modern in London become reasons for visiting in themselves, sometimes ahead of the art on display.

Through focusing on intensely individualistic designs such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao, James Stirling's Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart or Santiago Calatrava's Milwaukee Art Museum, Foster describes a radical shift in the role of art museums from interpretation, where they are attempting to explain works of art to visitors, to one of experience, where they offer the possibility of sensation relating to the works on view. However, these changes are not as dramatic as Foster makes out. Neo-classical buildings were also concerned to shape the experiences of visitors, albeit in ways that were similar in multiple buildings. He also fails to acknowledge the continuing and important role of interpretation in mediating aesthetic experiences. Nevertheless, the sculptural nature of contemporary museums of art has become an accepted, if not always appreciated, feature of museum architecture.

Increasing emphasis on the individuality and creativity of contemporary museum architecture has drawn the built museum environment into the debates around legitimisation and popularisation at the art museum. These questions are visually expressed by Andrea Fraser in her video piece 'Little Frank and His Carp' (2001). At the Guggenheim Bilbao, Fraser is filmed listening to the audio guide as it explains that the contours of the art museum have been influenced by Gehry (Little Frank)'s childhood experiences of fish and in so doing presents the experiences of the architect (artist) as vital to the creation of the building. Functional considerations, the influence of other stakeholders or the interaction of visitors are either under-played or not mentioned in the audio guide.[33] Fraser work takes the performative nature of the building to its, perhaps, ultimate conclusion and she reacts to the audio guide with surprise, followed by a direct physical engagement with the building that is hilarious in its inappropriateness. The work plays on the ways in which commentary on art museum buildings focuses on the history, intentions and

[33] Fraser, Andrea, *Little Frank and his Carp, 2001,* video, 6 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auOKsXnMmkg&t=42s – accessed 3/2017

practices of the architect rather than acknowledging the ways in which the art itself might be experienced. The legitimising activities of curation, display, conservation and interpretation are not part of this particular engagement with the art museum.

The adoption of architectural forms from outside of 'traditional' art museums to communicate to an expanded audience and their replacement with effects that are seeking popular appeal has been a criticism of museum architecture, most particularly of post-modernism. The historical dominance of classically inspired art museum buildings runs deep so that modern styles can be difficult to accept. Frederic Jameson describes an architectural turn that deliberately attempts to create an "aesthetic populism" through the absorption of influences from 'mass' culture such as,

> "TV series and Readers' Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel".[34]

The inclusion of influences from popular culture is understood as expressing only a desire to please and is "uncooked and theatrical," in Charles Saumarez Smith's phrase.[35] The Groninger Museum in Groningen has, for instance, been described as little more than a pastiche of elements from Disneyland; the inference being that the adoption of styles from a theme park is not 'proper' for a museum of art.[36] From this perspective, museum architecture needs to retain a separation of architectural styles and forms from those that are recognisable from leisure or tourist buildings: temples of culture cannot be arenas of popularity if they are to undertake their core missions.

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[34] Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism; Or the cultural logical of late Capitalism,* Durham, Duke University Press, p. 2
[35] Smith, Charles Saumarez, Architecture and the Museum, Journal of Design History, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1995 p. 254
[36] Storrie, Callum, *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas,* New York, I.B Tauris & Co, 2007, p. 163

Furthermore, populist architecture has been conflated with a commercialisation of art museums. French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, was by no means the first to express concern about these developments, although his critique is emblematic. For Baudrillard, museums have become part of a "pervasive culture of special effects and faux phenomenologies."[37] He describes contemporary art museum architecture as abandoning authentic engagements and instead offering only a simulacrum of reality in order to appeal to a wider range of people. For instance, he accuses Renzo Piano and Richard Roger's Pompidou Centre of being "a supermarketing of culture which operates at the same level as the supermarketing of merchandise". For Baudrillard, the art museum at Beaubourg is nothing more than a "monument to mass simulation effects," destroying the culture that it purports to display; it's very popularity is both a sign of its ultimate vacuity and, ironically, a threat to the objects on display.[38] This perspective rests on readings of contemporary museum architecture that sees it as making a break from previous neo-classical buildings and becoming more akin to commercial structures such as shops, offices or theme parks. The legitimising (and expected) architectural forms are replaced to achieve populist ends. The accusation by Baudrillard that novel architecture and commodification are indistinguishable is intended to be understood as the undermining of legitimate art museum functions such as the collection, guardianship and display of objects and towards a kind of dumbing down of culture.

Innovations in art museum architecture in the second half of the 20^{the} Century have challenged assumptions about the role of museum buildings in mediating the experiences that they offer to visitors. Ideals of legitimacy, based on isomorphic signifiers of neo-classical architectural styles, and understandings that experiences should be transcendent and separate from the everyday have been challenged by an approach that seems to encourage change, innovation and novelty and lauds the individuality of architectural style. However, concerns that these changes undermine the 'traditional' legitimising goals of art museums, such as curation, preservation and

[37] Foster, Hal, *The Architecture Complex,* London, Verso , p. 96
[38] Baudrillard, Jean, The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence, October, Spring 1982

academic work, have been conflated with worries about a 'supermarketing of culture' that puts museums on a par with commercial institutions. It was into these debates that the Guggenheim Las Vegas stepped. Just as at the BGFA, the Guggenheim in Las Vegas faced a city without legitimising structures for art museums and which had an image that was thought of as antithetical to culture. The Guggenheim needed to show that it was an authentic art museum so that visitors would understand that the experiences it offered were also authentic. Its approach was informed by the Guggenheim's experiences in Bilboa but also by its engagement with the idea of Las Vegas.

3. "In the missionary business" [39]

If during the 1990's Las Vegas was changing to offer a greater range of tourist attractions with the intention of expanding its audiences, so too were art museums changing with the intention of attracting a wider demographic. As outlined in the Introduction, in the 1990's academics such as Peter Vergo, Ivan Karp and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill began to argue for an increased emphasis on understanding the purposes of art museums rather than focusing only on the conservation and interpretation of objects.[40] Through making museums more relevant to more people, they proposed, that they might speak beyond the narrow world of professionals, academics and those already interested. For these academics the route to a broader demographic lay in community engagement. However, the success of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, seemed to show that tourism might offer a path to increased visitor numbers, if not necessarily to a broader demographic.[41] At the Guggenheim Bilbao, a signature building helped to define the art museum and acted as a visual 'hook' for tourist visitation. The museum drew attention to the city, previously a struggling port with little tourism, as well as earning the museum much needed income. However, Las

[39] Glancey, Jonathan, Art – the Showbiz Years, The Guardian, 8 October 2001
[40] Vergo, Peter, ed., *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Books, 1989;
[41] Vicario, Lorenzo and Monje, P. Manuel Martinez, Another 'Guggenheim effect'? Central city projects and gentrification in Bilbao, Atkinson, Rowland and Bridge, Gary eds. *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*, London, Routledge, 2005

Vegas was not at all like Bilbao, where the Guggenheim became the major tourist attraction and dominated the international image of the city. In Las Vegas, the Guggenheim was not able to convert the heathens. This section will explore the background to the art museum's arrival in the city.

In 1999, after the success of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the successful partnership between Deutsche Bank and the Guggenheim in Berlin, Thomas Krens started to look for further expansion opportunities.[42] In the press release issued to announce the new museums, Peter Lewis, Chairman of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, described the Guggenheim in Las Vegas as part of a process of reinventing the modern museum that started at the Guggenheim Bilbao.[43] As pointed out by Lewis in the press release, the experience of the Guggenheim in Bilbao was a significant factor in the museum's decision to locate to Vegas and the ways in which it approached its new home, in particular the conceptualisation of the art museum as a dramatically designed receptacle that could be imagined as the embodiment of the institution.

Designed by Frank Gehry, the Guggenheim Bilbao opened in 1997. Bilbao was a city with a failing industrial base that sought to revive its fortunes through a city-wide regeneration project. The art museum played a crucial role in the project through the attraction of large numbers of tourists that brought income to the city.[44] However, more importantly the museum changed the city's image through successful branding that rested heavily on the architecture of the building, which in turn attracted increased inward investment in other projects in the city.[45] Bilboa has a long nautical tradition however, this was not acknowledged by Gehry to be an influence, rather it was the personal experiences of the architect that were paramount influences on the building's

[42] Noever, Peter, *Visionary Clients For New Architecture*, Munich, Prestel, 2000, p. 74
[43] Solomon R. Guggenheim Press Release, 20 October 2000
[44] The Bilbao Effect, The Economist, 6 January 2014
[45] Plaza, Beatriz, On Some Challenges and Conditions for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao to be an Effective Economic Re-activator, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 32.2, June 2008

architecture, as parodied by Andrea Fraser's response to the building, discussed above. The gold, swooping exterior, a design feature that is favoured by Gehry, has been criticised for not relating to its host city and rather seeking to appeal to tourists on a global scale.[46]

The Guggenheim Bilbao has been described as an "impermeable institution holding the delirium of the city at bay".[47] Gehry's architecture for the Guggenheim Bilbao is, perhaps, better known than the contents of the art museum, as bluntly expressed by architect Philip Johnson: "If the architecture is as good as in Bilbao, fuck the art!"[48] The impact of the museum on the inhabitants of Bilbao, its role in gentrification, increasing property values and changes to employment opportunities, the distribution of income generated by the museum and the ways that the Guggenheim has worked with or for the city's communities have been fiercely debated.[49] Nevertheless, it has also become, arguably, one of the most influential art museums buildings of the late 20th Century. Heaped with praise by the media, architecture and art press, and the Basque Government, and demonstrably a successful tourist site, it is not difficult to understand why it influenced the Guggenheim in Las Vegas.

As director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Krens was a contentious figure for the ways in which he mixed the business world with the art museum world. His expansionist programmes, the opening of Guggenheim 'franchises' in Bilbao, Berlin and in Soho, New York, or as Krens called them "discontinuous exhibition spaces,"[50] the constant reporting that Guggenheims might open all over the world in places such as Macao, Helsinki, Abu Dhabi and Sao Paolo, the blurring or crossing of the lines between for-profit and not-for-profit

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[46] See Ockman, John, New Politics of the Spectacle: 'Bilbao' and the Global Imagination, eds. Lasansky and McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism*, 2004

[47] Storrie, Callum, *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas,* New York, I.B Tauris & Co, 2007, p. 167

[48] Bechtler, Cristina, ed., *Frank O Gehry/ Kurt W Foster,* Ostifildern-Ruit, Cantz, 1999, p. 18

[49] Vicario, Lorenzo and Monje, P. Manuel Martinez, Another 'Guggenheim effect'? Central city projects and gentrification in Bilbao, Atkinson, Rowland and Bridge, Gary eds. *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*, London, Routledge, 2005

[50] Goodale, Gloria, Art Movement: Guggenheim has extended its tentacles to Las Vegas, The Christian Science Monitor, 19 October 2001

organisations, and the blatant corporatisation of exhibitions with tie-ins with BMW and Armani, were seen as signs that the Guggenheim was acting less as an art museum and more as a business.[51] The overt acceptance of commerce as part of the museum's purpose ruffled the feathers of those that imagined the ideal art museum as properly divorced from the marketplace. The pivot towards dramatically increased access (almost on a global scale) and away from more localised social purposes brought accusations that the Guggenheim had a populist, as well as a commercial, agenda and was abandoning the legitimising goals of academic excellence, research and preservation.[52]

Unusually for a museum director Krens' first degree was in Political Science which he then followed with an MBA. It was Krens' vision of the museum as a type of business with works of art as one of its assets, the other being its name or 'brand,' that flew in the face of conventional museological wisdom in the late 1980s and 1990s. By aligning the approach and image of the Guggenheim with that of the leisure economy, Krens sought to deliberately position the Guggenheim to take advantage of revenue-generating opportunities through dramatically increasing visitor numbers. Criticism of Krens' approach to running an art museum sprang from his adoption of ideas that allegedly undermined the authenticity of the art museum-going experience by introducing elements from other disciplines or other industries.[53] He was criticised for valuing spectacle over an engagement with authenticity[54] and was described as the PT Barnum of the museum world, caring more for entertainment than for culture.[55] In a capitalist society, art museums are not immune to the effects of finance, however, Krens' populism was perceived as abandoning the legitimising (he might say elitist) aspects of the art museum and replacing them with a naked search for money.

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[51] For example Jed Perl quoted in Twardy, Chuck, The Guggenheim Las Vegas: What the Museum Means to the City and Vice Versa, Las Vegas Life, September 2001
[52] Barone Arnaldo, A New Economic Theory of the Public Support for the Arts, London, Routledge, 2015
[53] Carlson, Jen, Relief as Guggenheim's Thomas Krens Steps Down, The Gothamist, 28 February 2008
[54] Liber, Robert, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005
[55] Gormand, Tom, Doubling Down on Art, Los Angeles Times, 7 October 2001

Nevertheless, although Krens sought to include elements from commerce into the Guggenheim, it continued to be important that the institution remain recognisably an art museum. Therefore, when Sheldon Adelson first approached Krens to discuss a possible joint venture, Krens dismissed the proposal. He would later confess that he originally thought the idea was "too tacky."[56] The image of Las Vegas casinos could not be integrated into the ideal of the art museum. However, it was when Adelson brought Rem Koolhaas on board that Krens was persuaded to reconsider Las Vegas as a potential location for a Guggenheim.[57] For Krens, the most suitable architect for new Guggenheim buildings was Frank Gehry, the architect of the Guggenheim Bilbao.[58] However, Rem Koolhaas was another 'starchitect' who was internationally famous and whose involvement alone would create publicity. Krens revealed that,

> "It still did not seem likely that the Guggenheim could be there until we talked about architecture. Sheldon and Rob's (Goldstein) willingness to consider a permanent new building – and an ambitious architectural statement – and their agreement that Rem Koolhaas would be the architect, created the possibility for the Guggenheim to engage with the image of Las Vegas head on and come up with a creative solution that would add substantially to the character of Las Vegas on the one hand, as it maintained the dignity of a traditional cultural institution on the other."[59]

The role of architecture in the project, as here explained by Krens, would involve speaking to the city while at the same time showing that it was an authentic art museum that could be associated with 'a traditional cultural institution'. The building would also 'add substantially to the character of Las Vegas'. Here Krens reveals his intention that the Guggenheim would play a dominant role and have the power to change the city. The image of the city would help to attract visitors while the architecture would legitimise the institution.

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[56] Bohlen, Celestine, Guggenheim and Hermitage to Marry in Las Vegas, New York Times, 20 October 2000
[57] Jones, Will, The Clash, World Architecture, Issue 102, January 2002
[58] Ward, Vicky, A House Divided, Vanity Fair, August 2005
[59] Farquharson, Alex ed., *The Magic Hour – The Convergence of Art and Las Vegas*, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 2001, p.102

Therefore, for Krens, the architecture would be the primary means of communication and the contents of the institution would be secondary – or rather, without the authentication of the architecture the contents would not be able to hold their own within the Las Vegas environment. Indeed, in the Press Release put out by the Guggenheim announcing the plan for the new Guggenheim Las Vegas, it is the architecture that dominates rather than works of art, with two paragraphs devoted to the new design and only three lines to the proposed first exhibition.[60] In the catalogue for the first exhibition in the Guggenheim Hermitage, Krens returns to the theme of the architecture of the new spaces in a piece aptly titled 'Breaking New Ground'. Although he discusses the exhibition itself, it is the architecture that dominates his writing. Described by him as "architecturally significant," the impression is that the building was more important than the paintings.[61]

For the museum professionals and the architect, Las Vegas represented an opportunity to bring culture to a place that they thought had little or no culture. As Krens said, to 'go to where the heathens are'. It is possible that there was almost a sense of transgression that a museum of art should be in a populist, tourist setting. When asked about his reason for accepting the Las Vegas project, Koolhaas said, that "the whole world has become a casino, meaning anything goes. We wanted to be part of that, to get away from solemnity".[62] Koolhaas bombastically defined the architecture of the Guggenheim spaces as representing a completely new approach to museum architecture. For him, "An entirely new architecture has been generated here. It is high and low. It creates a continuous field where separations are no longer necessary or possible".[63] The buildings that would house the Guggenheims in Las Vegas would, according to Krens, bridge the gap between high and low culture and enable people to experience and enjoy both. He

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[60] Press Release, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 20 October 2000

[61] Guggenheim-Hermitage, Las Vegas, *Masterpieces and Master Collectors: Impressionist and Modern Paintings from The Hermitage and Guggenheim Museums,* September 16 2001 – March 17 2002 Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2001, p.9

[62] Altabe, Joan, Leisure, the Guggenheim Gamble, The Rob Report, January 2002

[63] Pearson, Clifford, A., Guggenheim and Hermitage Museums, Architectural Record, Vol. 190, Pt. 1, 2002, p. 101

promised that, with the Guggenheims in Las Vegas, "the old stereotypes are losing their grip at an ever-increasing speed".[64] Lisa Dennison, then deputy director of the Guggenheim, said that the Guggenheim Venetian should appeal to "everyone, whether the art professional or the visitor who might never have gone to an art museum".[65]

The expansionist aspirations of Krens, the willingness to experiment and to partner with commercial interests, the avowed financial goals and the recognition that a museum could be more than the works of art in its collection, made the Guggenheim a good fit for the Venetian and Las Vegas. The city's reputation for urban experimentation, valorisation of money and continuous creation of leisure and tourist branding for its casinos and resorts, such as at the Venetian, could be elided with Krens' vision for the art museum. The relationship between the Guggenheim and the Venetian and Las Vegas was coloured by the experiences of the Guggenheim in Bilbao. The successful experience of the art museum encouraged a perspective that direct engagements with tourism could be both popular and attract significant numbers of people, while at the same time being praised by the legitimising art, architecture press and other high culture media outlets. In effect, they made money and gained cultural capital at the same time. In both Bilbao and Las Vegas, museum architecture was intended to function to provide a recognisable visual identity that would authenticate their 'museum-ness'. However, although Bilbao was an unexpected location for an art museum because of its industrial past and lack of previous cultural significance, Las Vegas was a very different city.

4. Vegas isn't fake – authenticity in Sin City

Much was made by both the Venetian and the Guggenheim of the nature of their collaboration and the ways in which the two institutions were different but complimented each other. As in a

[64] Guggenheim-Hermitage, Las Vegas, *Masterpieces and Master Collectors: Impressionist and Modern Paintings from The Hermitage and Guggenheim Museums,* September 16 2001 – March 17 2002 Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2001, p. 9

[65] Cling, Carol, All Star Art: New Venetian Gallery Boasts Dream Collection, Las Vegas Review Journal, 7 October 2001

Regency novel, if the Guggenheim presented itself as a potentially good catch for Las Vegas with little more than its good name and legacy, the Venetian was a rich suitor with unsophisticated tastes and the need for the legitimising influence of a partner. Both parties were aware that they each had deficiencies that could be improved by the match; one being financial, the other being reputational. However, the contradictory nature of Las Vegas, meant that for its fans such as Dave Hickey, the city represented true authenticity through its devotion to populism.[66] Meanwhile, for those that advocated increasing popularisation at museums, the arrival of the Guggenheim in Vegas offered an opportunity to present a legitimate museum-going experience to a greater number of people. Yet, although both institutions saw themselves as making up the other's deficiencies it was not clear which party had a greater need for money and which for an enhanced reputation. In the context of the art museum world the Venetian lacked legitimacy, but in the context of Las Vegas it was the art museum that struggled with ideals of authenticity.

Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson initially made his fortune in COMDEX, a computer trade show. In 1988 he diversified and bought the Sands Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas and this provided him with the base to expand his gaming interests in the city as well as elsewhere in the US and then into China. In 1995 he imploded the Sands, once home to Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, and by 1999 it had been replaced by the Venetian, which opened at a cost of $1.5 billion. It adopted the successful themed-resort concept, pioneered in Las Vegas by Steve Wynn, using the famous Italian city as its inspiration. The Venetian is a huge resort including a 36 storey five-star hotel, with over 3,000 rooms, an extensive range of restaurants, nightclubs, bars, a shopping mall, and entertainments including a branch of Madame Tussauds, as well as, inevitably, extensive gaming opportunities. During the planning stages for the Venetian, Adelson and his team approached a number of established US museums with offers of partnership in order to establish what would essentially be a rival to Wynn's Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art. However, until

[66] Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy,* Los Angeles, Art Issue Press, 1997

they opened discussions with the Guggenheim, they were constantly rebuffed as "Las Vegas was deemed to be an affront to their (the art museums') senses".[67]

The choice of Venice as a theme aligned the hotel-resort with other high-end luxury mega-resorts such as the Bellagio and the Monte Carlo, as opposed to cheaper casino-resorts such as Circus Circus, New York, New York and Mandalay Bay. Just as at the Bellagio, the Venetian explicitly connected luxury, high culture, entertainment and gambling in a single tourist experience. The Venetian features reproductions of the key tourist sites of its namesake, including the Campanile, the Doges' Palace, the Rialto Bridge and of course the Grand Canal including singing gondoliers. Each icon is a scaled-down model of the original and deliberately includes cracks, imperfections and colour changes. The designers relied not only on photographs of contemporary Venice but also on paintings by Tintoretto and Veronese.[68] Just as with other mega-casinos on the Strip, it is an enclosed, imaged, space within which everything is scripted and monitored and from which guests need not leave, as the resort aims to cater for every type of tourist experience, including heritage tourism.[69]

The Venetian was designed by the Stubbins Associates and Wimberly, Allison, Tong and Goo. It would be wrong to underestimate the Venetian's architecture both in terms of its forms and its intents. The Venetian's replica of Venice is in itself a vast undertaking. Critics of Las Vegas architecture dismiss themed resorts as inauthentic and kitsch. However, a great deal of craftsmanship has gone into the Venetian. There are over 80,000 finials, cornices, pilasters, capitals and statues.[70] Produced by a single firm in Las Vegas, these features are hand-made, although from gypsum, concrete and foam sprayed with urethane coating rather than marble. As explained by architectural writer, Wayne Curtis,

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[67] Twitchell, James B., *Living it Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 248
[68] Curtis, Wayne, Belle Epoxy, Preservation, Vol. 52, No. 3, May/June 2000
[69] Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century,* New York & London, Routledge, 2003
[70] Curtis, Wayne, Belle Epoxy, Preservation, Vol. 52, No. 3, May/June 2000

> "the designers have even manufactured a genuine sense of mystery here, with open spaces revealing themselves unexpectedly beyond erratic twists and turns, just like an ideal city. For a moment you believe you could wander down this little alley over here and find your way into a whole other neighbourhood with more piazzas and canals and crooning gondoliers. But no: A few dozen yards later it dead-ends at a food court".[71]

Norman Klein has observed that Las Vegas casinos deliberately include areas that seem incomplete so visitors might feel that the casino owners were not in complete charge of every aspect of the building – 'junking it up', in Klein's phrase.[72] The imperfections are intended to mimic the reality of urban spaces that have developed in more organic ways, so that resort guests can feel more relaxed. The Venetian, therefore, is authentic in the sense that it is a planned space, that has taken a great deal of effort to create and which is dedicated to mediating visitors' experiences.

The casino may have been closely based on its namesake but it is no mere reproduction. Adelson boasted "we are not going to build a faux Venice; we are going to build what is essentially the real Venice".[73] The intention at the Venetian was to capture the essence of the Italian city and relocate it to Nevada. Venice has long had a reputation that has attracted tourists, whether it be because of its art and architecture, or because it promised licentiousness and debauchery. The 'essential' element of Venice that the casino would attempt to recreate was not only the buildings but was the experience of the city's atmosphere – as illusionary in the casino as it is in the Italian city. The casino provided a recognisable environment which acted as a stage for tourists to perform in ways that were encouraged by the architecture. The authenticity of the Venetian is what Umberto Eco called Hyper-Reality, in which the recreation becomes more real than the

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[71] Ibid., p.35
[72] Klein, Norman M., Scripting Las Vegas: Noir Naifs, Junking Up, and the New Strip, Rothman, Hal and Davis, M, *The Grit Beneath the Glitter: Tales From the Real Las Vegas*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002
[73] Twitchell, James B., *Living it Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, p.236

original and can be enjoyed in different ways.[74] That the Italian city is the prime version does not necessarily mean that the Nevadan version is, in the context of Las Vegas, lacking in authenticity. Indeed, while it may be a copy of an Italian city it is behaving in ways that are expected of a casino.

The architecture of the casinos has played an important role in the creation and retention of the city's mythos. Casinos in Las Vegas have always attempted to create environments that separate them from the everyday world and they have always used 'themes' to create unique experiences. The earliest casinos in Vegas in the 1920s and 1930s adopted Western themes and names such as El Ranchero and the Last Frontier. Neon lights became common early in the architectural history of the city, usually as a way to indicate the difference between hotels and casinos. It was this attempt to detach visitors from the everyday that was a key element in Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour's seminal book on Las Vegas architecture, *Learning from Las Vegas*. Although Tom Wolfe, Rayner Banham and Archigram had all previously commented on the architecture of Las Vegas, *Learning from Las Vegas* remains the most influential study of the architecture of the city.[75] The popularity of the casinos, according to Venturi et. al. lay in part with their straightforward, easy to comprehend, symbolism which helped people to believe they were in an oasis away from the 'hostility' of the quotidian world.[76] The authors used Las Vegas to explore a vernacular style of architecture that was more concerned to be a means of communication than it was with academic goals.

Learning from Las Vegas started a process by which it has become increasingly possible to describe the city not as an anomaly but as an archetype. For Venturi et al it is the symbolism of the architectural forms rather than their formalist nature that dominates the space of Las Vegas. In

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[74] Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyper-reality,* London, Picador, 1986

[75] Banham, Reyner, Las Vegas, Los Angeles Times West Magazine, 8 November 1970; Wolfe, Tom, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby,* New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965; Cook, Peter et al., Instant City, in Archigram, 1972

[76] Venturi, Robert, Scott Brown, Denise, Izenour, Steven, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, MIT Press, 1977

spite of the chaos and ugliness, which the authors do not dispute, they portray an animated multi-faceted and contradictory city which exists in mockery of modernist ideals. By redefining what had previously been kitsch, drawing attention to the purpose and meaning of the symbols, and at the same time explicitly linking Las Vegas to Pop Art, Venturi et. al. started a process of redefining Las Vegas. The adoption of Las Vegas as a postmodern exemplar, a process begun by Scott Brown, Venturi and Izenour, celebrated the very things that had once been seen as negative about the city. Its brash acceptance of hybridity and pastiche, its rampant commercialism and vernacular architectural styles were praised rather than damned. For them the city was honest and genuine in its architecture, unlike modernism which had become detached from society through its abstractions and disconnection from history. The straightforward nature of Las Vegas architecture in which, according to Venturi et al., nothing was hidden, made it genuine because it took as its inspiration the demands of the people who visited rather than the academic world of architecture criticism. In *Learning from Las Vegas*, the previously illusionistic elements derived from film, media and leisure that were adopted as elements for a new, postmodern, urban environment were intrinsically more genuine than their predecessors.

For Venturi et. al. it was the adoption of recognisable architectural forms as a way to communicate (even if the message was only 'Visit a Casino'), that gave the city's buildings more authenticity than other buildings which adopted a more 'rarefied' and academic approach. The lack of pretention and utilisation of widely recognised vernacular communications brings the city into the ambit of more people. As described by Dave Hickey, it is these elements that make the city more democratic and more authentic than other places. The relationship of a casino to tourists, money and leisure is seemingly clear and easy to understand. Although the Vegas casinos channel financial capital into the hands of corporations and wealthy individuals and create environments into which everyday problems simply cannot be allowed to intrude on the

tourist experience, this has become sufficiently widespread across the US, and elsewhere, that it can no longer be thought of as unique. The honesty of Las Vegas, regardless that the message is one of hyper-capitalism, extreme individualism and the disregard of society, is an element of the city that is appealing, particularly when compared to the perceived elitist messages from mainstream and established institutions.[77]

If the Venetian Casino was a copy of the original city, it was one which hoped to capture some of the character of the prime version. However, although the city of Venice has been a tourist destination for centuries it has ceased to be a vibrant trading port for some time. The authenticity of the Italian city lies not in its evolution but in the opposite; its unchanging historical nature. Conversely, it is the very popularity of Las Vegas casinos, achieved through constant reinvention, that serves to delegitimise them in some readings of the city, making them part of a pernicious commodification and cultural dumbing down that threatens the entire US.[78] The cultural capital associated with museums and architecture, both abundant in Venice, provides symbolic capital and therefore distinction that the financial capital of the casinos cannot match. Furthermore, in the context of Las Vegas, the Venetian is entirely authentic. It is a themed-casino in a city that is dominated by similar institutions. As explained by Las Vegan artist, Jeffrey Valance: "In a town where fake is the name of the game, seeing something truly authentic seems all the more unreal."[79]

Within the discourses around legitimacy and popularisation at art museums, the authenticity of art museums is rarely questioned even if their methods are interrogated. This authenticity is frequently framed against the inauthentic or fake. For the architecture of the Guggenheim, as we will see below, this meant a clear demarcation between the legitimate museum and the populist

[77] Hannigan, John, *Fantasy City: Please and Profit in the postmodern metropolis,* London, Routledge, 1998; Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy,* Los Angeles, Art Issue Press, 1997
[78] Baudrillard, Jean, *America,* London, Verso, 2010; Begout, Bruce, *Zeropolis: The Experience of Las Vegas,* London, Reaktion Books, 2002; Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyper-reality,* London, Picador, 1986
[79] Storrie, Callum, *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas,* New York, I.B Tauris & Co, 2007, p. 208

casino. However, ideals of authenticity were problematised for both the casino and the art museum due to the stated importance of the architecture of the Guggenheim. Architecture in Las Vegas has become one of the city's defining features, one of the elements that shows the 'true' city. Furthermore, it is the very populist aspects that comprise the city's casino architecture that have been presented as showing its authenticity. The calls for a new kind of museum architecture in the city that would attract a wider demographic did not align the art museum with the Venetian but stood as a challenge In a city where the actions of tourists are deliberately and knowingly scripted and controlled by the built environment, the Guggenheim was an interloper, offering a performative stage but a script that rested on ideals of museum authenticity formed from concepts of a binary between the legitimate and the popular. It is time to turn to the architecture of the two Guggenheim spaces.

5. The Big Box – "Almost theatre-like"[80]

The Guggenheim in Las Vegas was, unusually for a museum, split into two spaces. Although they were close to and within sight of each other, Koolhaas designed each in a different style. Koolhaas described the larger space as "almost theatre-like" while the smaller space was described by him as "jewel-like".[81] The duality of the spaces, one large and industrial, the other small and quiet, was appreciated by architecture critics when the Guggenheim opened. Despite Rem Koolhaas's assertions that his designs combined the high culture status of museums with the low culture status of a casino, architecture critics mostly saw them as rejecting the casino and embracing the authenticity of the museum. Will Jones, for instance, described the two spaces as representing two different approaches to competing with the Las Vegas location. According to Jones, the Guggenheim Las Vegas represented Koolhaas's attempt to meet the entertainment and leisure aspects of Las Vegas head on as, through the use of grand space and natural lighting, Koolhaas created a performative stage on to which could be set contemporary art, in particular

[80] Koolhaas, Rem, Artforum, Summer 2010, p. 287
[81] Ibid.

sculpture, and on to which visitors could appear.[82] Meanwhile, for the Guggenheim Hermitage, Koolhaas created a retreat from the hustle and bustle of Las Vegas, a quiet space for contemplation. "We built a strongbox of Cor-Ten so the museum retains its autonomy and the art retains is aura," explained Koolhaas.[83] For the institution to retain its authenticity, Koolhaas believed that it needed to be conceptually and physically separate from the host casino, to be separated from the outside world and offer transcendent experiential possibilities. Images of the Guggenheim spaces support these readings, showing that each space was defiantly different from the Venetian casino.

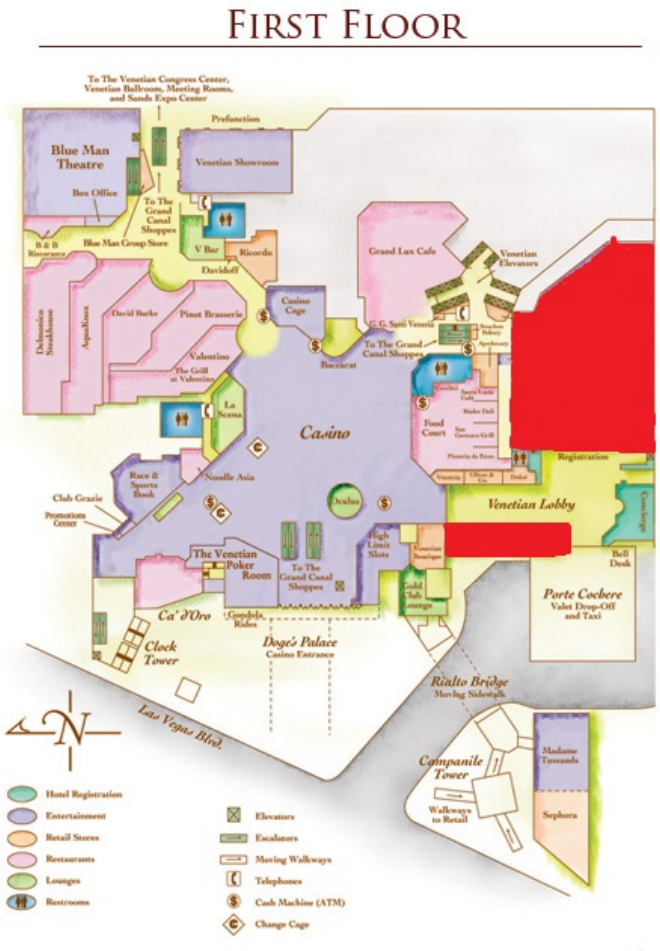

Figure 2. Plan of the First (Ground) Floor of the Venetian. The Big Box is the larger red coloured space, while the Jewel Box is the smaller red coloured space.

[82] Jones, Will, The Clash in World Architecture, Issue 102, January 2002
[83] Pearson, Clifford, The Guggenheim and Hermitage Museums, Architectural Record, Vol. 190, Pt. 1, 2002

Unusually for an art museum the Guggenheims in Las Vegas had a very minimal façade and were not easy to see from outside. The Guggenheim Las Vegas was unable to convey a message about its identity beyond the confines of the Venetian as it was located in a space between the casino and its multi storey car park. With no grand entrance vista, no way to view it from afar and no immediately visible way to differentiate it from its host, visitors to the Guggenheim Las Vegas needed to know about it in advance and to want to make the effort to visit. Compared with many museums which have no immediate neighbours, the location of the Guggenheim Las Vegas prevented it from entering into many of the usual discourses with visitors which museum buildings create. The façade of the Venetian therefore became the de-facto façade of the art museum (Fig. 3). The architecture of the Guggenheims, therefore, were unable to function in Las Vegas as the architecture of the Guggenheim Bilbao had done. From within the Venetian, the Guggenheim Las Vegas would not be able to provide a visual identity for the city.

Figure 3. The Las Vegas Guggenheim as seen from the Strip. Note the banners advertising the Russia! exhibition at the Guggenheim Hermitage.

However, once inside the casino-resort, the entrance was accessible and visible from the entrance and Porte Cochere and the ticket office was in the grand entrance lobby to the resort. It would have been difficult from any guest checking in to the resort not to see the Guggenheim Las Vegas or at the very least the signage for it. The entrance to the Guggenheim Las Vegas spanned almost the entire 160 foot width of its frontage and although there were security guards, as there would be at the entrance for almost any art museum, visitors could enter at any point (Fig. 4). The name 'Guggenheim Las Vegas' appeared above the entrance in enormous letters, 17 feet tall, extruded from the ceiling. Once the visitor passed through the entrance into the gallery space itself there was more signage, again proclaiming the name of the art museum, still suspended from above, this time in etched glass that was readable from within the gallery space (Fig. 5). The dramatic signage at the entrance to the casino immediately proclaimed the museum's presence through its brand name.

Figure 4. The entrance to the Guggenheim Las Vegas from the Venetian Porte Cochere. Note the signage in white letters above the entrance itself.

As the first engagement with the institution that most visitors would have, the entrance to the Big Box needed to be striking but also to communicate the identity of the museum. Therefore, the signage performed the functional task of informing people of the presence of the Big Box as well as expressing the character of the institution. The gateway signage was produced in collaboration with 2 X 4, a consultancy that specialises in designing signage and branding for cultural institutions, and was intended specifically to create a distinct transition between the casino space and the art museum space.[84] At the Bellagio, the intention had initially been to display an Italian Renaissance painting behind the reception desk. At the Venetian, the museum itself could be seen once people entered. However, while a painting behind the reception desk would have brought an artwork into the casino itself, the word 'Guggenheim' above the entrance served to demarcate the art museum from the casino. At the same time it linked the space to the global Guggenheim brand. The museum's name acted to authenticate the art museum, although this assumed a high degree of brand awareness amongst guests to the Venetian, and provided a dramatic visual break between the casino and the museum.

Koolhaas's architecture has been praised for giving people a space to perform.[85] The large spaces in many of his buildings act as stages on to which people can act out roles, either assigned through the architecture or, as claimed by Koolhaas, provided by the visitors themselves. The Big Box was undoubtedly intended to be a space that encouraged people to perform. Indeed Koolhaas described the Guggenheim as "a museum that was able to perform".[86]

[84] Website of 2x4 https://2x4.org/work/guggenheim-las-vegas/ - accessed 23.2.21
[85] Hartoonian, Gevork, *Architecture and Spectacle: A Critique,* Farnham, Ashgate, 2012
[86] Koolhaas, Rem, Artforum, Summer 2010, p. 287

Figure 5. The entrance to the Guggenheim Las Vegas seen from within the exhibition space.

Note the signage in glass above the entrance/exit.

The Big Box was extremely big measuring 63,700 square foot, approximately 210 feet long, 160 feet wide and 70 feet high (Fig. 6). The interior of the Guggenheim Las Vegas deliberately echoed that of an industrial space. The walls were not clad and their concrete construction was exposed. The metal beams of the roof and walls were also left exposed adding to the industrial feel. According to Roberto Gargiani this was a deliberate reference to Andy Warhol's Factory in New York.[87] Venturi et al. likened Las Vegas to Pop Art, of which Warhol was an important practitioner, and if this reference was understood by visitors it would have underscored the link between the space and the art world. Access for the objects was provided by a giant pivoting door measuring 69 feet x 69 feet. The door was painted with red and black chevrons, further adding to the industrial impression. According to Krens: "Bilbao was a gritty industrial city, so we needed an exuberant building. In Las Vegas, which was already exuberant, we wanted an

[87] Gargiani, Roberto, Rem Koolhaas, OMA: The Construction of Merveilles, Oxford, Routledge, 2008, p.256

industrial building."[88] Other museums have utilised industrial elements such as Tate Modern and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow. The choice of an industrial 'theme' was therefore not unique to the Big Box and it was conceived of as being a visual alternative to Vegas architecture.

Likened to a NASA hanger[89] or a shipbuilding shed[90] the materials of the Big Box contributed, together with the size, to differentiating the space from the, similarly enormous, spaces of the Strip casinos. It also had the effect of separating the experience of the casino from that of the Big Box. In its use of a faux Renaissance style, the Venetian proclaimed that it should not be taken too seriously by visitors, masking its serious commercial intent. By contrast, through its adoption of industrial materials the Big Box was asking that visitors took it seriously as a genuine space rather than one that was kitsch or a simulacrum. The austerity of the industrial materials proclaimed that it was not a place for frivolity and 'mere' entertainment but a serious and authentic space not signified through phoney opulence, but through the stripped-back honest post-industrial look referencing the one thing that the Venetian sought to deny, the world of work.

Of course, the Big Box was no more an industrial space than the Venetian was part of Venice. The industrial look of the Big Box and its immense size provided visual prompts that themed the visitors' experience. Gevorik Hartoonian in describing Koolhaas's work identifies the architects' use of theatricality and spectacle.[91] For Hartoonian, the use of immense spaces by the architect indicates that the internal space is, in itself, a visually aesthetic form. Fredrick Jameson describes contemporary architecture as achieving "a vocation to enact the totality," that is achieving a merging of the image and the form to provide a unifying experience for the visitor.[92] This is

[88] Pearson, Clifford, A., Guggenheim and Hermitage Museums, Architectural Record, Vol. 190, Pt. 1, 2002, p 101
[89] Ibid., p258
[90] Jones, Will, The Clash, World Architecture, January 2002, Issue 102. p. 30
[91] Hartoonian, Gevork, *Architecture and Spectacle: A Critique,* Farnham, Ashgate, 2012
[92] Jameson, Frederick, *The Seeds of Time,* Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 143

achieved through providing visual spectacle so that the semiology plays out as theatre from within the space of the building. In this way the Big Box conformed to Venturi's concept of buildings as scenography.[93] The Guggenheim Las Vegas was not just a large space to be seen as part of the whole of the building but it was a space that was intended to place the visitor upon a specific aesthetic stage. For Hartoonian, in the case of Koolhaas, this is a visual spectacle in thrall to capitalism and commodification. The large spaces of Koolhaas's designs are not intended to provide public space into which people can place their own readings and decide how to use, but instead the theatricality of the spaces are intended to provide visual prompts that will influence the behaviours of those within them.[94]

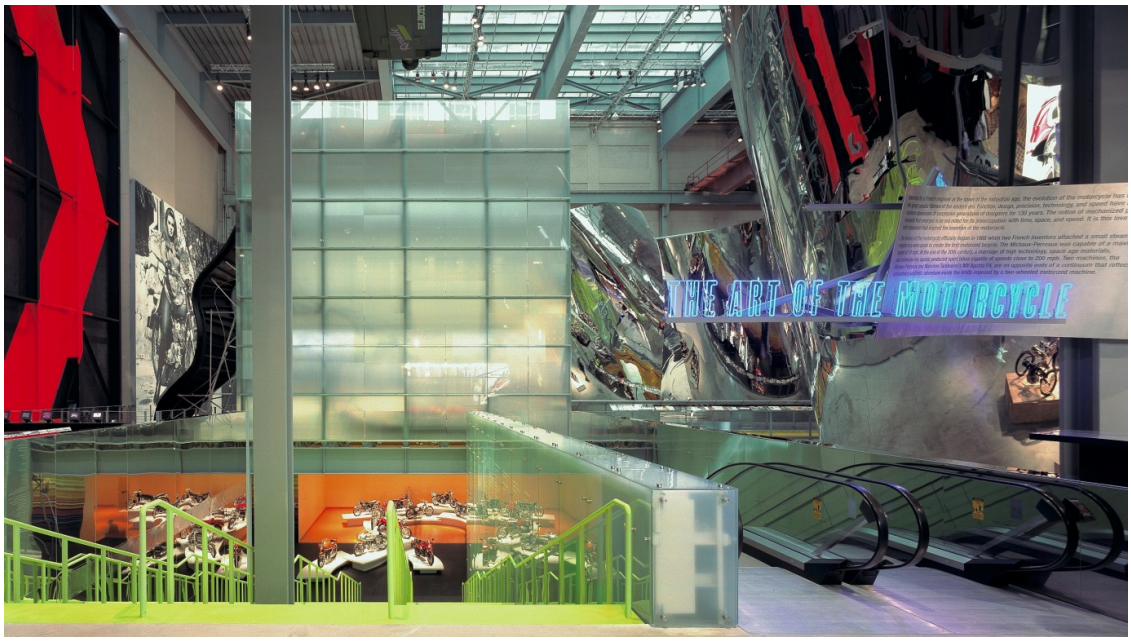

Figure 6. The Interior of the Guggenheim Las Vegas

The inaugural exhibition at the Big Box was The Art of the Motorcycle, the show that Adelson and Goldstein had originally wanted the Guggenheim to bring to Las Vegas. In New York the exhibition had attracted 4,000 visitors a day and had also gone on to draw big crowds when it

[93] Farquharson, Alex ed., *The Magic Hour – The Convergence of Art and Las Vegas*, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 2001
[94] Cuito, Aurora, *Koolhaas/OMA,* Dusseldorf, teNues, 2002

moved to Bilbao. However, the exhibition was criticised for being lightweight and populist and for the perception that the Guggenheim's curatorial independence had been sacrificed for the sake of sponsorship from BMW. The display of the Art of the Motorcycle exhibition at the Big Box was designed by Krens' first choice architect, Frank Gehry. It took visitors on a chronological 'journey' from the earliest motorcycles to the most modern on a route that snaked around the space of the Big Box on different levels and with Gehry's trade-mark undulating and reflective interior walls. The architecture was intended to control visitors' movements and influence their actions and to create an environment which was a deliberate escape from the world around the museum space; noise was reduced, colours were altered, materials changed. Gehry's display design forced visitors to follow a set route through the large space, emulating a common approach to museum display and thereby encouraging understandings of the Big Box as a place that was in-line with other art museum buildings.

Postmodern art museum buildings such as James Stirling's Staatsgalerie deliberately play with the idea of art museum interiors as providing labyrinthine journeys. Douglas Crimp describes his experience of the Staatsgalerie: "One can ascend a ramp in front of the museum, enter the space of the rotunda … whereas to enter the space from inside the museum, one must always weave one's way to it as if to the center of a labyrinth."[95] Similarly Baudrillard declared that Renzo Piano and Richard Roger's Pompidou Centre was like "a labyrinth" or "a Circular Ruin" which linked individuals not through shared experiences but through a horrific multiplicity of options.[96] Although the identification of labyrinth-like elements in these buildings is identified by both writers as an unwelcome innovation, in reality the deliberate creation of spaces which are large, but at the same time cramped and labyrinthine has been a common feature of museums since the 19th Century. Labyrinths are fundamentally based on the idea of a journey, of a path through chaos, out of which one reaches transcendence and therefore buildings and display spaces which

[95] Crimp, Douglas, *One the Museums Ruins,* p. 314
[96] Baudrillard, Jean, The Beaubourg-Efffect: Implosion and Deterrence, October ,Spring 1982

lead visitors on journeys of understanding are not only controlling behaviours but are also conforming to one of the earliest expected functions of art museums - pedagogy.[97] Many art museums create journeys for visitors, often chronologically through art periods or styles. This type of hang, initiated in the Louvre in 1790, remains prevalent in modern art museums. Even thematic hangs seeks to explain ideas to visitors through sequential displays which require specific trajectories.

The use of gargantuan space is a feature also synonymous with Las Vegas casinos. The gaming floors are some of the largest continuous rooms in the United States. The behaviours of people within these spaces are not only closely monitored but the way that the spaces are organised is also intended to encourage particular behaviours. The traditional layout of the casino floor was first codified in the 1970s by Bill Friedman, an ex-gambling addict turned gaming professor. Friedman studied the gaming floors of over 80 casinos in Nevada and published his findings in *Designing Casinos to Dominate the Competition.*[98] He advocated, amongst other things, low ceilings and slot machines that were laid out as a labyrinth, rejected any decoration that was not related to gambling and stated that gambling should start within ten feet of the entrance to suck people in straight away. The close, maze-like approach spilled over into the design of other parts of the hotel which existed solely to funnel people onto the gaming floor.

The space of gaming floors changed, as has much else in Vegas, as a result of Steve Wynn. In the 1980s he hired interior designer Roger Thomas to oversee the interior of the Mirage. Thomas introduced a more opulent and spacious approach which became more pronounced at the Bellagio and was adopted in other casinos. However, the maze-like approach remains the norm and, together with the themed elements of most casinos, the gaming floor contributes to the theatricality and performative qualities of casino architecture. The creation of architectural spaces

[97] Hein, George, Museum Education, Macdonald, Sharon, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies,* John Wiley and Sons, 2010

[98] Friedman, Bill, *Designing Casinos to Dominate the Competition,* Reno, Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gambling, 2000

and of displays of works can act in similar ways to gambling floors; that is to control peoples' behaviours through the provision of an immersive experience that guides them both physically and emotionally.

Figure7. The staircase in the Guggenheim Las Vegas. Note the mirrored wall on the left hand side and the luminous green colour.

Immediately having entered the Big Box, the visitor was confronted by a staircase that led down to a lower level of the gallery (Fig. 7). The staircase was 30 ft. wide and its size was enhanced by placing mirrors along one side. The bold green colours of the stairs further drew attention towards them. Through giving the staircase such a striking and unusual colour Koolhaas may have been alluding to the famed use of neon on the Las Vegas Strip. In a press release put out by the Guggenheim, the stairs were described as a "processional staircase" suggesting that the role of the stairs went beyond their function.[99] Processions occur for religious or festive purposes and the word suggests an orderly movement of people from one place to another, a movement that in itself carries meaning. To refer to a processional staircase in an art museum context draws attention to the symbolic functions of the stairs and asks that this symbolism be implicitly

[99] Press Release, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 7 October 2001

understood. These stairs were not just for moving visitors from one part of the display space to another but they performed a symbolic function.

The staircase is an architectural feature that is so prominent in museum architecture that its presence has become almost expected, even in the most contemporary of museums, but its purposes are rarely questioned. For buildings constructed before the advent of lifts and escalators staircases performed a vital function in linking different floors and allowing access to these floors by visitors. From a purely functional perspective a staircase is a necessary element in the design of any building which has more than one floor. They need to be large enough to accommodate the expected number of visitors, be sufficiently well-built to take the strain of repeated use and be positioned to make optimum use of the space allowed by the building. However, there are other roles for stairs that may change or even dominate the functionality of convenient ascent and descent.[100]

Stairs are an architectural form that go beyond functionalism and are a vital element in controlling and affecting the behaviour of those who use buildings towards specific responses. Through forcing users to travel in certain directions, and often in a certain manner, stairs are not simply architectural features waiting to be observed but are rather active participants in the experience of museum buildings. The ways that museums transport people from one level to another, such as the escalators at the Pompidou Centre, the train to the Getty in Los Angeles, the ramp at Tate Modern, or the circular incline at the Guggenheim in New York are a critical element in museum architecture, regardless of architectural styles and periods. The Pompidou Centre has replaced stairs with escalators and places these on the outside of the building rather than within its walls. However, travelling to the top of the building, and being visible while doing so, continues to be an act that symbolises a move from the everyday at ground level and towards a higher physical and intellectual place. The train ride to the Getty amplifies this by literally

[100] Templer, John, *The Staircase: History and Theories*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1992, p. 7

transporting the visitor from ground level up a hill to a museum that can only be reached in this manner.

Staircases appear both outside and inside art museums. Those that are outside usually form part of the façade and direct focus towards the overall form of the building. 19th Century neo-classical buildings such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Chicago Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts rest on a plinth or crepidoma so that the entrance can only be reached by ascending a broad and imposing flight of steps. The visitor is therefore forced to travel upwards from one level to another, an upwards movement intended to suggest a move from the earth and into a higher level of being. As this was an architectural strategy that was also commonly used for churches and temples and one that was also adopted for palaces, not only was the ascension of the stairs an act of moving upwards towards enlightenment it was also an act of moving away from the everyday world and into one that raised the spirit and soul to a more important level. It was literally as well as metaphorically uplifting.

The suggested, and actual, move above the quotidian world was intended to encourage visitors to think of the museum-going experience as separate from those encountered in other, more prosaic, locations. Moving from ground level to a building of imposing stature was also intended to symbolically represent power. The visitor, dwarfed on the large staircase, and even further dwarfed by the size of the museum itself, was encouraged to understand that the museum and the objects contained within were greater than the visitor. Raised above ground and housed in a huge edifice the objects were out of reach of all who visited. The ubiquity of imposing stairs in museum architecture encourages visitors to think that they are a necessary element of all museums and therefore their presence contributes to the perception of the authenticity of the visiting experience.

The staircase at the Guggenheim Las Vegas took visitors from the entrance area down below the level of the main floor into a lower level that contained smaller galleries which could be used to

display objects that might otherwise not be easily exhibited in the enormous main gallery space (Fig. 8). With such a large space to work with, the creation of a lower ground floor was not necessary but rather a deliberate design feature. Without a façade and comprising a single, enormous space, there was no need for a public staircase. Although the entrance was dramatic and the name Guggenheim appeared prominently above the foyer to the exhibition space, deprived of an opportunity to raise the museum above ground level and place it on a dais, thus making visitors walk up a flight of steps to reach it, Rem Koolhaas included a staircase within the building itself. While the direction of travel was reversed the symbolism was not. Interestingly, Koolhaas' most recent museum building, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, a renovated prefabricated concrete pavilion in Moscow, also includes a signature staircase inside the building, this time flanking a Soviet era mural.

Figure 8. The staircase at the Guggenheim Las Vegas looking up towards the entrance.

The adoption of this feature and the positioning of it to create maximum effect deliberately plays with easily recognised neo-classical museum design elements. As with many post-modern buildings the use of features from different periods acts simultaneously as an homage or joke and as a way to relate to vernacular understandings of the built environment. This process, described by Charles Jencks as double coding, is "the combination of modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects."[101] Thus Koolhaas, by including a superfluous staircase includes an instantly recognised feature of neo-classical museum architecture while at the same time, for those able to read it, creates a visual pun on the neo-classical use of staircases to uplift visitors.

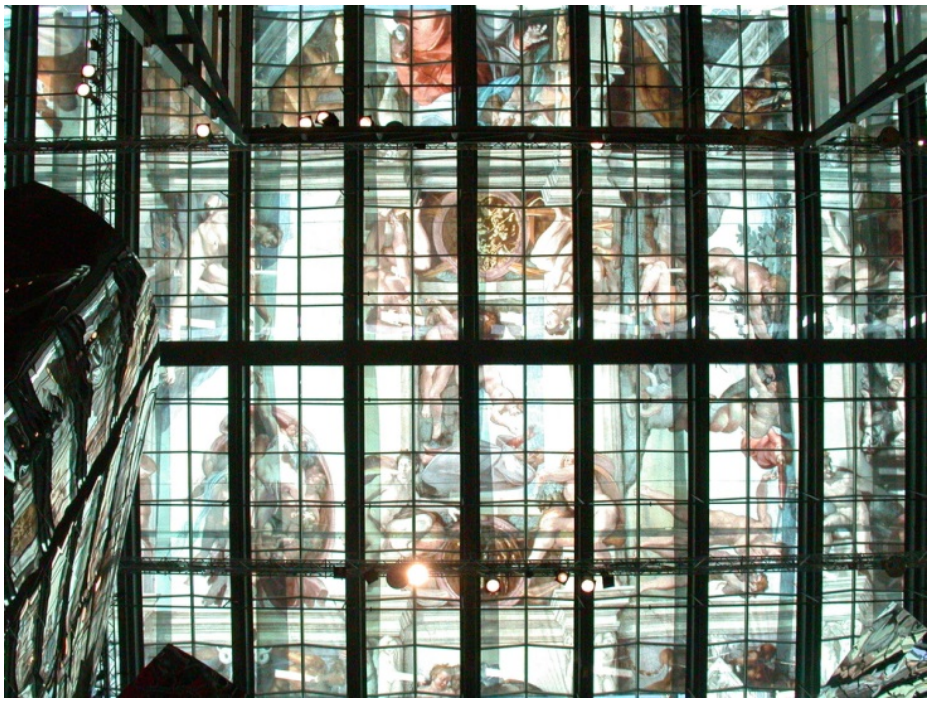

Figure 9. The skylight at the Guggenheim Las Vegas with Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel reproduced on it

The functionalism of the skylight in art museums, that is to provide light for the art exhibited within the building, can be fulfilled without any reference to the symbolic functions of the

[101] Jencks, Charles, *What is Post Modernism*, Academy Editions, 1986, p.14

architectural form. In other words, its 'use' may not be connected to the way it is perceived by those who see it. The skylight in the Big Box was a much commented feature of the space (Fig. 9). That it was decorated with a reproduction of the painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was described as a joke on the pretentions of the Venetian Casino.[102] The inclusion of a skylight in a museum setting is not, of course, novel but rests entirely on traditional forms and symbols. In a way similar to that of staircases, skylights are a common feature of many museums for functional reasons. In an era before artificial lights the only way for visitors to be able to see works was through the availability of natural light. With the walls used for hanging works of art the only possibility to bring natural light into a gallery was through the ceiling. For most of the history of art museums, natural light was held to be the best way to appreciate works of art even if it meant not being able to see them in the detail to which we have become accustomed today. Therefore, architect Louis I. Kahn, referring to his famous Kimbel Art Museum declared that "no space, architecturally, is a space unless it has natural light".[103]

Contemporary art museum lighting continues to use sunlight as the benchmark for all artificial lighting, although the constantly changing nature of sunlight throughout the day or year means that there is no agreement as to the definition of sunlight.[104] Intriguingly it was the natural light from the skylight that Barbara Bloemink, the Guggenheim Las Vegas' director found problematic: "There was a huge skylight bringing in bright natural light so only works that are not affected by light could be displayed, which was short-sighted and greatly limited the types of art works that could be shown".[105] The changing daylight entering through the skylight was intended to reflect on to the green staircase and provide a variety of sparkles and transparencies.

[102] Webb, Michael, Restrained Exhibitionism, The Architectural Review, Vol. CCXI, No. 1264, June 2002, p. 54
[103] Quoted in Mezzatesta, Michael and Patricia Loud, *The Art Museums of Louis I. Kahn,* Duke University Press, 1990, p. 262
[104] McGlinchey, Christopher, Colour and Light in the Museum Environment, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Vol. 51, No 3, Winter 1993-1994
[105] E-mail Interview with Barbara Bloemink 23 May 2012

According to Gargiani, the use of natural light was yet another deliberately chosen effect differentiating the Guggenheim from the windowless casinos, where even clocks are banned.[106]

Frequently, in 19th Century art museums, in important rooms, the entry of natural light occurred through a dome, thereby consciously echoing similar features in churches. The use of domes in an ecclesiastical setting was a deliberate architectural effect intended to raise the eyes of congregants upwards, out of the buildings themselves and into the heavens. Indeed, interpreting the ceiling as the sky is a fundamental element in Western religious architecture.[107] According to Karl Lehmann "domes were the leading monuments in the development of the vision of heaven"[108] and represent a development from paintings of heaven on flat roofs to a movement towards pushing the representations of heaven skyward. With the introduction of the ocular space in the apex of the dome, representations of heaven were joined to an architectural feature that linked the inside and the outside both symbolically and in reality. The use of domes in a museum context continues this tradition whereby those who are within them are encouraged to think of themselves as part of a world that is a function of cosmic forces, whether Christian or otherwise.

The replacement of the ceiling with glass panels not only performs a function with regards to lighting but attempts to locate the visitor within these great spiritual forces. The presence of skylights inevitably opens up a room towards the sky and encourages visitors to look for the source of light – that is to look upwards. As with staircases, the museum is not just a building containing works of art; it is a building that is intended to encourage transcendent experiences as they channel visitors out of the everyday world around them into the heights of heaven. Visitors move physically and symbolically upwards and, once inside the museum space, that movement is further encouraged through drawing their gaze further upwards, towards the heavens. Therefore,

[106] Gargiani, Roberto, Rem Koolhaas, OMA: The Construction of Merveilles, Oxford, Routledge, 2008
[107] Lehmann, Karl, The Dome of Heaven, The Art Bulletin, Vol. 27, No 1., March 1945
[108] Ibid., p.19

by recreating this process at the Guggenheim Las Vegas, the architecture consciously aligns the experience of visiting with that of visiting other museums thus asserting that the experience was equal to, and as authentic as, that of a visit to any other art museum.

The reproduction of the Sistine Chapel on the skylight is therefore, not simply a continuation of the faux-Renaissance forms of the Venetian, nor simply a deliberate reference to Rome as opposed to Venice, both great cities of artistic and architectural production. The skylight exactly recreated the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, including the architectural features such as the windows along the sides and Michelangelo's painted architectural features. The iconography of the Sistine Chapel is intended to be read as a complex spiritual ascent from an unconscious awareness of God to His ultimate splendour. It's deliberate placement on the ceiling of the Chapel was intended to direct the visitors' gaze upwards and, through the use of trompe l'oeil effects, out of the building itself and into the realm of heaven. It can be read as a deliberate attempt to emulate the effect of the 'ceiling of heaven' – that is to make the visitor aware of the 'cosmic' nature of the world through looking upwards and wish to transcend the earth into the celestial world.

The Big Box was the flagship space for the Guggenheim in Las Vegas. It's location by the entrance to the casino ensured that it was one of the first attractions that visitors would encounter and its enormous size was intended to give it prominence. However, the architecture of the space made no concessions to being located in a casino. Instead, there was an architectural isomorphism where features that are recognisably of the art museum were utilised in the Big Box to aligned it to ideals of 'museum-ness'. Importantly the involvement of a famous architect gave the Big Box an architectural individualism, which again in contrast to the Venetian, meant that it could claim to be authentic and not a reproduction. The involvement of Koolhaas was a decisive factor in the Guggenheim deciding to locate in Las Vegas and it was intended that his designs would determine the character of the art museums and attract visitors. Therefore, the choices

made by the architect were integral to the ways in which the institution sought to accrue distinction, for itself and for it host. From the entrance to the Big Box, through the choice of a supposedly industrial theme, to the skylight with a decoration based on a Roman work of art rather than a Venetian one, the Big Box can be read as standing in defiant contrast to the Venetian. The types of museum experience it was referencing through the same forms was one which encourage visitors to feel that they were leaving the quotidian world and were transcending to a different and higher plane. A physical and conceptual space that was apart from casinos. Its authenticity derived not from a blend of legitimising and populist elements, as at the BGFA, but from the use of expected signifiers to denote its similarity to idealised museum architecture and its difference from sites of leisure.

6. The Jewel Box – "A privileged space"[109]

The Guggenheim Hermitage, nicknamed the Jewel Box, was a joint venture between the Guggenheim, the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and the Venetian. It was physically separate from the Guggenheim Las Vegas, although they were within sight of each other. However, while it differed from the Guggenheim Las Vegas in terms of scale and building materials it was similar to its bigger sibling in that it was also intended to separate visitors from their surroundings and offer a transcendent experience comparable to that of other art museums. Although much was made of the unusual material used for its walls, apart from the building material, the architectural forms used in the Jewel Box, like those of the Big Box did not in reality differ dramatically from those used in other museum buildings. The architecture of the Jewel Box showed that it was intended to be considered as an authentic art museum because it conformed to frequently encountered art museum architectural forms. Its smaller size meant that visitors did not tend to spend long there but its design meant that the experience of visiting was intended to be in the mainstream of museum engagement.[110] Although the type of art on view

[109] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas ,University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 45
[110] Ibid.

was different from the Big Box, comprising paintings rather than sculpture and older works compared to contemporary works, the architecture attempted to influence visitors to experience it in the same way; that is as something that was not only separate from the kinds of leisure experiences offered at the Venetian but also as an experience that was authentic because the venue was supposedly more authentic than its host.

The 8,300 sq. ft. exhibition space of the Guggenheim Hermitage was made out of Cor-Ten steel plates which were chemically treated to produce a rust-like finish and then coated with a transparent seal to keep the scale from detaching (Fig. 10). The deep brown colour of the Cor-Ten steel, both inside and outside was described as "remarkably soft,"[111] as having "the rich tone and silky texture of Hermes leather,"[112] and echoing "the St Petersburg museum's velvet-lined galleries" (Fig. 11).[113] In a press release from the Guggenheim, the material of the Jewel Box was described as,

> "a velvety rusted surface evocative of the velvet-covered walls in the 18th Century classical galleries at the Hermitage. The severity and serenity of the steel façade – which can be seen from the Las Vegas Strip – dramatically contrasts with the derivative faux architecture of the major hotels and casinos in the immediate area".[114]

The choice of materials, Cor-Ten steel with wooden floors and ceilings, contrasted directly with the choice of materials in the Big Box where the floors and walls were concrete, while the glass ceiling let in natural light. The effect of these materials in the interior was similar to that on the exterior, that is to separate the space from its surroundings. According to William Fox, "It's clear that the gallery is an enclosure creating a privileged space".[115]

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[111] Pearson, Clifford, The Guggenheim and Hermitage Museums, Architectural Record, Vol. 190,Pt. 1, 2002, p.101
[112] Webb, Michael, Restrained Exhibitionism, The Architectural Review, Vol. CCXI, No. 1264, June 2002, p.52
[113] Young, Eleanor, Viva Las Vegas, RIBA Journal, Vol. 108, November 2001, p. 30
[114] Solomon R. Guggenheim Press Release, 7 October 2001
[115] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas ,University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 45

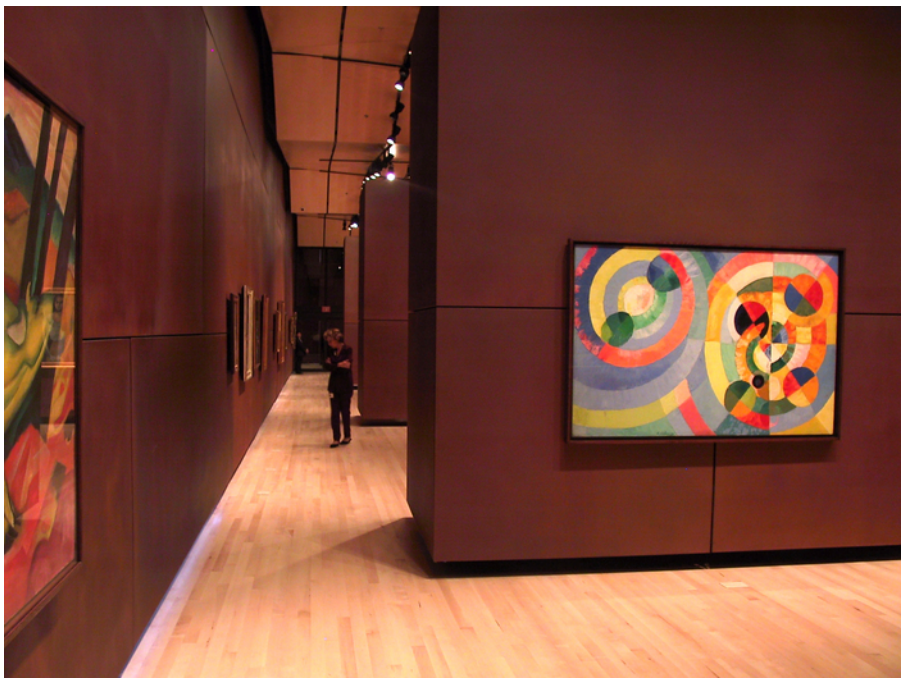

Figure 10. Interior of the Guggenheim Hermitage with works from the first exhibition at the gallery. Note the colour of the Cor-Ten steel of the walls.

The relationship between the Guggenheim Hermitage and the building around it, as evidenced by the choice of materials, was one of antagonism rather than sympathy. The architecture of the Guggenheim Hermitage was intended to be far removed from the marble of the floor, the gold leaf (gold paint) of the column pilasters and the delicately painted frescoes of the Venetian. The Guggenheim Hermitage was initially seen by visitors to the casino as a solid wall of rusted Cor-Ten steel through the marbled columns (Fig. 12). As suggested by Will Jones, some visitors to the casino could have thought that there were building works underway behind the rust coloured wall.[116] By choosing a material that was at once warm and industrial, Koolhaas immediately set his design apart from its host and indeed from Las Vegas casino architecture in general. While this may have had the effect of drawing attention to the art museum it also separated it from its host environment. The architecture of the Guggenheim Hermitage could be appreciated in relation to that of the Venetian in a way that was not easily possible for the Guggenheim Las

[116] Jones, Will, The Clash, World Architecture, January 2002, Issue 102

Vegas. The exterior façade, although not large gave the Jewel Box a 'face' to the world that the Big Box did not have. Positioned adjacent to the Venetian's Porte Cochere, the Guggenheim Hermitage's external wall could be seen from The Strip, albeit only if you knew where to look and fleetingly if in a car. Etched on to the Cor-Ten steel was the art museum's name "like a graffito"[117] across the entire length of the façade wall.

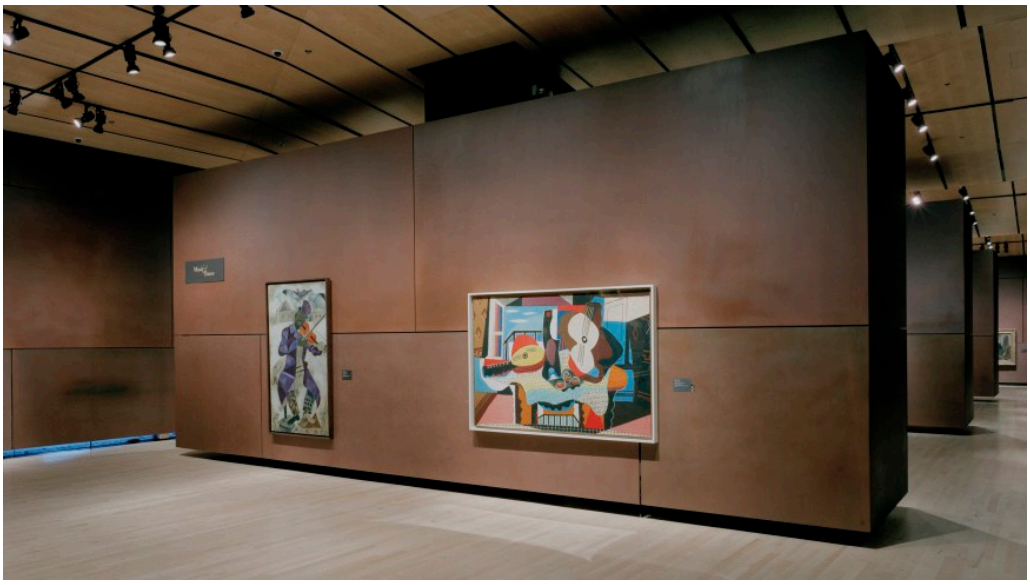

Figure 11. Interior of the Guggenheim Hermitage with works from the first exhibition. Note the colour of the floor and ceiling.

Observers believed that the material of the Jewel Box related to natural materials. However, although the rusted metal might be seen to be a natural building material, particularly compared to the exuberant Renaissance-style architecture of the Venetian, it was not natural as the steel had to be treated to achieve the look and then layered with a seal to protect it. Despite a superficial appearance of 'nature' the Cor-Ten steel walls were as manufactured as anything within the Venetian. However, unlike the faux-Renaissance architecture of the Venetian it was not intended to be read as deliberately unreal. Therefore, explicitly, the Jewel Box was intended

[117] Gargiani, Roberto, Rem Koolhaas, OMA: The Construction of Merveilles, Oxford, Routledge, 2008, p. 260

to be separate from the building through which it was accessed and the material from which it was made was intended to play an important part in this process.

Figure12. Wall of the Guggenheim Hermitage seen from the Venetian Lobby.

The materials used for the Jewel Box, therefore, had a symbolic purpose beyond any functional or experiential one. The material of the gallery helped to turn what was a small rectangular space in the entrance lobby of the casino into a space that had its own character that was designed to encourage visitors to feel that they were separated from the surrounding casino. The architecture of the space was a physical manifestation of disinterested engagements as it encourage visitors to feel separated from the quotidian world. The architecture and colour of the Jewel Box was at once austere and brutally modernist, offering a sharp contradiction to the Las Vegas environment. The Cor-Ten steel not only contrasted with 'inauthenticity' of the materials encountered in the Venetian by seeming to be more natural. The treated wood and steel, in the context of a Las Vegas casino, aligned the Guggenheim Hermitage to the natural world of the desert around the city rather than the man-made world of The Strip. Yet, whilst Las Vegas

casinos are criticised for taking their influences from other sources and using these to create idealised environments, the Jewel Box despite deploying the same methods, was praised for providing an authentic transcendent space.[118]

It was reported that the colour of the interior of the Jewel Box was intended to echo the colours of the walls in the State Hermitage in St Petersburg (Fig. 13).[119] For an exhibition space that avowedly intended to attract neophyte art lovers, the evocation of the 18th Century galleries of a Russian art museum might have been a reference too far, particularly as the walls in the Hermitage are a deep red rather than a rust red and are not textured in the way that the walls in the Jewel Box are. Indeed, the Hermitage has more in common architecturally and possibly even conceptually with the Venetian than it does with the work of Rem Koolhaas. In particular, the Winter Palace, designed by Italian Giacomo Quarenghi, is based on the Apostolic Palace in Rome and was decorated in copies of the Roman frescoes undertaken by German artists. It too therefore is a building that uses elements from older famous buildings to create a specific environment and sense of veracity. The Raphael Loggia at the Hermitage is even a direct copy of a room in the Vatican just as the Venetian is a direct copy of the city (Figs. 12 and 13).

[118] Fox, William, *In the Desert of Desire,* University of Nevada Press, Reno, 2005, p. 51
[119] Gargiani, Roberto, *Rem Koolhaas, OMA: The Construction of Merveilles*, Oxford, Routledge, 2008, p. 242

Figure 13. The Patriotic Hall, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Note the deep red colour of the walls.

To enter the Jewel Box visitors passed through a small foyer where they were able to purchase tickets before entering into the main exhibition space. Once inside, unlike the Guggenheim Las Vegas, there were no restrictions on the way visitors could chose to move around the space, unlike the Guggenheim in New York for instance. As the internal walls were not connected to the exterior walls, visitors could move around the space in any number of different routes and although the space was not large, particularly compared to the Big Box, the freedom of movement meant that the works could be approached in differing ways rather than in the linear manner of traditional art museums. Furthermore, the interior walls could themselves be moved to create differing spaces within the gallery. The movement of visitors therefore might differ from exhibition to exhibition. However, visitors had to leave through a gift shop located at the opposite end of the rectangular space from the entrance. Therefore, despite relatively

unconstrained movement within the Jewel Box all visits ended with a retail opportunity. This feature of museum design has now become almost obligatory in museum architecture.

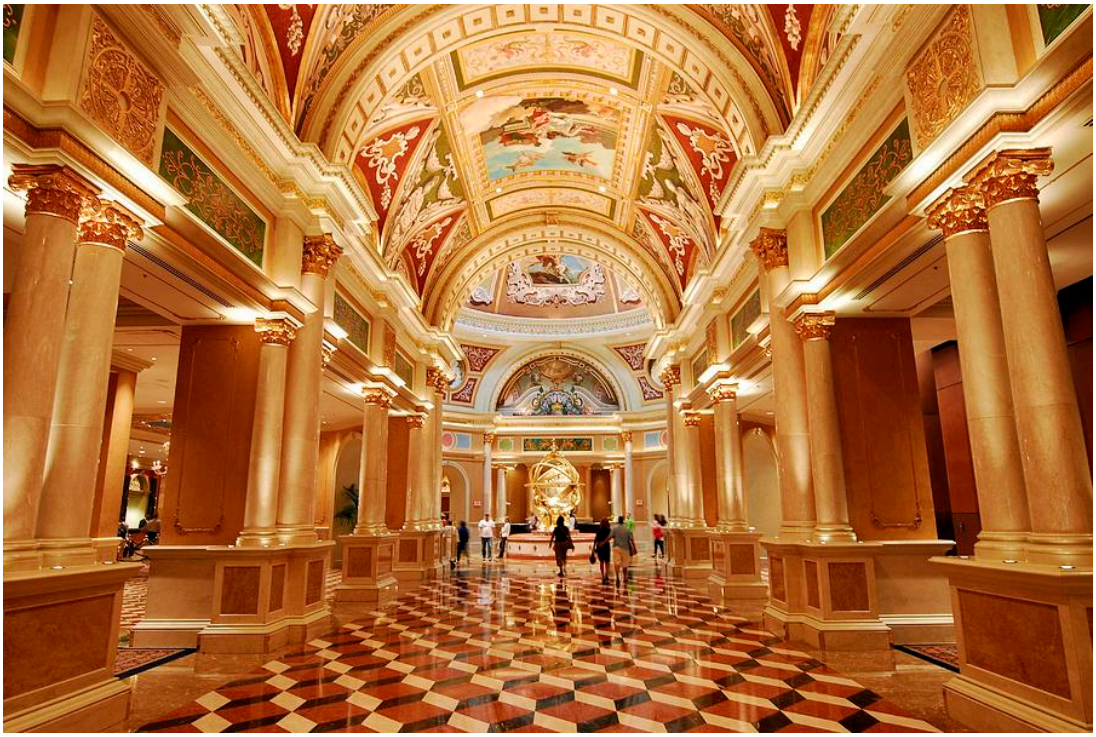

Figure 12. The Lobby at the Venetian, Las Vegas.

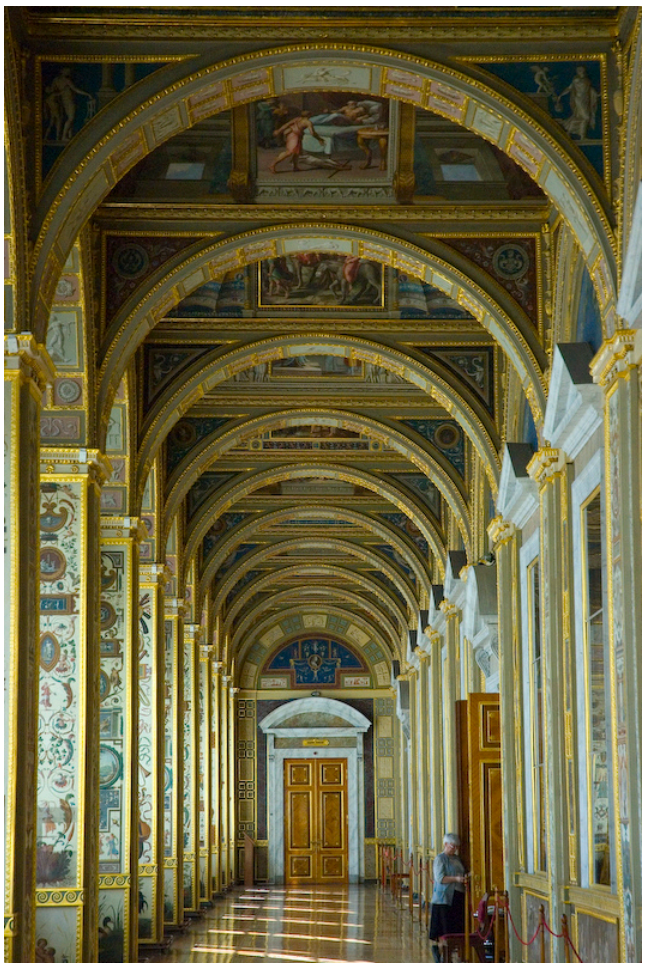

Figure 13. The Raphael Loggia at the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. It is a direct copy of the original in the Vatican.

The Jewel Box was intended to offer a different kind of experience from the Big Box – jewel-like rather than factory-like, contemplative rather than demonstrative. The experiences in the Jewel Box were intended to be quieter, more personal and less dramatic. These kinds of experiences can be found to be encouraged in many museums of art such as the Frick in New York. Those inside both spaces were offered a space to perform, even if the types of performances were potentially different from the big Box. However, its intention was similar – to offer experiences that were markedly different from those in the Venetian casino, potentially transcendent and authentically of the idealised art museum. The Jewel Box owed more to the traditional ideals of the kinds of engagements that neo-classical architecture are supposed to provide – spaces for

personalised, quite engagement with works of art. The impact of the individuality of the architect was less demonstrative in the Jewel Box than in the Big Box. Therefore, unlike its bigger sibling the symbolism was read as relating to existing, and longer-established, art spaces. However, the Jewel Box still reacted to its location by asserting its claims to being a genuine art museum in contrast to the casino and literally built a barrier between itself and its host.

7. Conclusion

The Big Box, was run as a partnership between the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino and on the surface it appeared to be another no-risk investment for the Guggenheim.. In a deal similar to that in Bilbao,[120] the Venetian paid between $25 million and $30 million in construction costs to which the Guggenheim did not contribute.[121] The Guggenheim paid rent to the Venetian until the construction costs were paid off and thereafter there was a 50% split in profits between the two organisations.[122] In Bilbao, operating costs were covered 75% by the Guggenheim and 25% by local and regional public institutions and the initial investment in the building was recouped within the first seven years.[123] However, in Las Vegas there was no agreement about operating costs which were met by the museum. Krens admitted "although people think the Venetian is funnelling money into the museum, in fact it's the other way around. The Guggenheim pays about $50,000 a month in rent to the hotel."[124] The Guggenheim in Las Vegas needed about $6 million annually to cover the operating costs including the salaries of all the staff.[125]

This deal might well have worked; however, the Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation in New York began to face severe financial difficulties and the Foundation's chairman, Peter Lewis, was

[120] Plaza, Beatriz, The Return on Investment of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 30.2
[121] Bohlen, Celestine, Guggenheims Offer Novelty in Las Vegas, New York Times, 9 October 2001
[122] Telephone interview with Elizabeth Herridge 4 May 2012
[123] Plaza, B and Haarich, S, A, Guggenheim-Hermitage Museum as an economic engine? Some preliminary ingredients for its effectiveness, Transformations in Business & Economics, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (20), 2010, p.133
[124] Solomon, Deborah, Is the Go-Go-Guggenheim Going, Going . . ..", New York Times Magazine, 30 June 2002
[125] Ibid.,

forced to donate $12 million of his own money to keep the institution afloat. The money came with two restrictions. Krens was to rein in his global expansionist programmes and the money was to be spent on the foundation's core sites in New York and Venice.[126] There would be no more money for Las Vegas. The 11th September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US severely reduced the overall numbers of tourists to Las Vegas, and to the Guggenheim. The key factor, therefore, that spelt the end for the Guggenheim Las Vegas was its inability to attract the projected 5,000 visitors a day and visitor numbers were closer to 2,000.[127] Forced to rely on ticket receipts to meet the rental payment to the Venetian, the Guggenheim Las Vegas had no choice but to close its doors in 2003. Despite the closure of the Big Box, the Venetian remained helpful to the Guggenheim Hermitage and in the last year of its existence even waived the rent on the space in order to try and keep the art museum going.[128] Unfortunately, visitor numbers were not sufficient and eventually in 2008 the Jewel Box also closed. The histories of many art museums are long and illustrious and this can make the closure of an art museum seem either anomalous, inevitable or perhaps deserved. [129] However, art museums are not immune to market forces in a capitalist economy and both Guggenheim spaces closed for financial reasons.

This case study has looked at ways in which architectural cultural capital signifiers were used to confer legitimacy on the Guggenheim in Las Vegas. The emphasis on the architectural statement made by Rem Koolhaas's designs meant that the objects on display were not as important to the image of the Guggenheim as the spaces. It was the architecture that primarily asserted the institutions 'museum-ness' rather than aesthetic engagements. The experience of the Guggenheims in Las Vegas was intended to be understood as immersive and transcendent, recognisable as authentically of the art museum and derived from the architecture. For art museums their authenticity, or their architectural forms, are rarely questioned but, located within

[126] Ibid.
[127] Thomas, Kelly, The Guggenheim Downsizes, Artnews, February 2003
[128] Telephone interview with Elizabeth Herridge 4 May 2012
[129] Lieberman, Paul, Staying in Vegas? Not the Guggenheim, The Los Angeles Times, 19 April 2008; Twardy, Chuck, Remembering the Guggenheim, Las Vegas Weekly, 12 December 2013

a Las Vegas casino, the Guggenheim's relationship to authenticity and the reality of the experience of visiting, were an essential factor. Chapter 1 outlined how the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art used its relationship to authenticity as a legitimising signifier which was, in turn, used to create a populist attraction. However, the Guggenheims had a different relationship to their role as part of a casino-resort. The rhetoric of Thomas Krens and Rem Koolhaas about the ways in which the Guggenheim would 'take art to the heathens' indicated that the museum and the casino were not considered by them as equally legitimate. The finished spaces underlined this by being deliberately unsympathetic to their host environment and encouraging experiences that were directly opposite to those in the casino. Through the use of architectural forms that are commonly found in other museums, the Guggenheim spaces aimed to influence the behaviours of visitors by suggesting transcendent experiences in ways similar to many other museums. The tourist experience of the Guggenheims was not folded into that of the Venetian but was offered as an alternative. Indeed, the authenticity of the Guggenheims was presented in opposition to the supposed inauthenticity of the Venetian.

The understanding of the meanings of symbolic codes defines taste and confers distinction. For Bourdieu, symbolic capital is "the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate".[130] However, the use of inappropriate symbolic codes reveals an inherent lack of understanding and can constitute an inauthentic engagement. The codes themselves may change, but it is the ability to understand them that is important as this provides legitimacy. Furthermore, popularization and legitimization are believed to occur at opposing ends of the field of cultural production – to constitute a dichotomy.[131] The use of these codes at art museums remains frequently unquestioned and their legitimacy is accepted through institutional isomorphism.

[130] Bourdieu Pierre, Social Space and Symbolic Power, Sociological Theory, Vol 7, No. 1, 1989, p. 17
[131] Bourdieu, Pierre, The Market for Symbolic Goods, Poetics 14, April 1985

Field (a network of objective relations between positions) is shaped by the social location, which in this study constituted the Venetian and Las Vegas. This case study has compared the ways in which art museum architecture is understood to represent legitimacy and authenticity and the ways that architecture in Las Vegas is understood to represent a different type of authenticity. At the Guggenheims in Las Vegas it is possible to see the limits to which art museum isomorphic architectural signifiers could be used. In effect, the 'genuine' nature of the Guggenheims was undermined, rather than supported, by their antagonism to the casino. It was not clear which symbolic codes, represented by architecture, constituted legitimacy as it was possible to perceived art museum and casino architecture in the same way.

Despite claims around the novelty of modern museum architecture, the forms used in art museums buildings remain the same even as commentators complain of their unsuitability or of a slide into populism by the inclusion of elements from shopping malls or theme parks. The inclusion of these forms allows for widely recognised understandings for what constitutes a legitimate art museum building. It was not the individualism of the museum architecture in Las Vegas that was intended to convey messages of legitimacy but its isomorphism. The supposedly unique designs of the Las Vegas Guggenheims favoured conceptualising the performative expectations of buildings that were expected to create novel experiences, allowing them to propose unique performative experiences for their visitors. There was however, a visible lineage that linked the new and the old in these buildings.

For classically influenced art museums the architectural impact rested on the recognition of forms that appear in other museum buildings. Therefore, experiences within the structures could be expected to be broadly similar. The impact of immense scale, supposedly natural building materials, staircases and skylights on visitors are used to encourage transcendent experiences that transport them out of the quotidian world, and these effects continued at the Guggenheim Las Vegas spaces. At the Guggenheim in Vegas this meant not just that quotidian life could be left

behind as visitors moved figuratively into a higher plane. The casino, which was surrounding the art spaces, was also defiantly kept at bay lest any of the pleasures of sensation should intrude on the pleasure of beauty. The intellectual retreat from the quotidian world that the BGFA encouraged through interpretation was, at the Guggenheim Las Vegas a physical retreat from the everyday world epitomised by the Venetian. The co-option of culture by commerce to achieve populist goals feeds into debates around legitimacy and popularisation at art museums. The architecture of museums frequently works to remind visitors, perhaps unconsciously, that their visit is special and potentially transcendent. The history of museum architecture, and in particular the similarities between neo-classical museums and places of worship, shows that the built environment is intended to encourage responses that separate visitors from the quotidian..

After it closed, the Big Box was converted into a theatre which showed Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical Phantom of the Opera. Koolhaas's 'space to perform' was completely remodelled to look like the Paris Opera House, the setting for the musical. As with other Las Vegas 'versions,' the Venetian Theater, as it is now called, is smaller than the prime version but was produced with startling accuracy. The production of Phantom has now also closed and the space is used as a venue for concerts by bands such as by ZZ Top and Chicago. There is now no trace of the Guggenheim Las Vegas. In 2012 the space used by the Guggenheim Hermitage became the Imagination Gallery which described itself as offering "art-centric entertainment" and "limited engagement installations".[132] It too is now closed and has been replaced by a lounge for VIP guests. The Guggenheim art museums were replaced by attractions that offered more populist experiences, although in the cut-throat world of Las Vegas entertainments these too have been superseded.

Although the Guggenheims in the Venetian strove for cultural legitimacy through institutional isomorphism, they could not escape being part of the entertainment offerings of the casino.

[132] Zaller, Tom, Viva Art Vegas: Tom Zaller promotes culture with Image Exhibitions, Las Vegas Sun, 17 July 2013

Their replacements were also arts-based, and although without the imprimatur of an internationally known art museum, they were attractions that relied on well-known and recognisable offerings. The Phantom of the Opera has been performed in 28 countries since its initial performance in 1986. Meanwhile the Imagination Gallery showed reproductions of machines designed by Leonardo da Vinci and photographs by Magnum photographers. However, unlike the BGFA, the Guggenheims never acknowledged that they were attractions. Instead they chose to 'double down' on the dichotomy between legitimate and popular by emphasising the differences between themselves and the Venetian. The legitimacy of the art museum was shown, in part through its contrast to the casino. Authenticity was shown through comparisons to something that was allegedly inauthentic, legitimacy proclaimed in contrast to populism.

However, tourist authenticity is an evolving and subjective concept.[133] Mimesis can be imitation, but it can also indicate the kind of relationship existing between the object that is being copied and the copier. It is possible to see the Vatican and the Hermitage in St Petersburg as genuine even as one contains spaces that are direct copies of the other. Koolhaas's designs took influences from Renaissance paintings, from industrial design, from the Hermitage, from Pop Art and, significantly, from well recognised neo-classical art museum architectural forms. The Venetian was also influenced by older buildings in Venice as well as by works of art by Canaletto and Veronese. However, the visual aesthetic of the casino could be said to be more in line with the Hermitage Museum than with the Guggenheim as both rested heavily on Renaissance sources. The message of authenticity for the institution and the architectural signifiers that it used were based on ideals of the art museum. It aimed to gain cultural capital through the use of isomorphic signifiers that connected it to other museums of art. However, in a Las Vegas context, casino architecture has developed to create (or recreate) recognisable spaces through the

133 Macleod, Nikki, Cultural Tourism: Aspects of Authenticity and Commodification, in ed. Smith, Melanie and Robinson, Mike, *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World,* Clevedon, Channel View Publications, 2005

use of easily identifiable forms from other places and periods. The use of recognisable forms from other museum buildings, therefore, need not have separated the Guggenheims conceptually from the Venetian. It is not that one building, or type of architecture, is in some way more authentic than another. Rather that, what may seem to be uncontroversial signifiers of authenticity could be undermined by the Las Vegas location. The use of the Sistine Chapel in the Big Box seemed to be a clever appropriation to journalists writing for architectural journals, but it was only one of a large number of similar appropriations in the casino as a whole. The Big Box and the Jewel Box showed the limits to which ideals of museum authenticity could be put in the Las Vegas context.

The Guggenheim in Las Vegas adopted signifiers that were part of mainstream museum understandings of the relationship between legitimacy and populism. The forms used in the architecture of the two spaces - scale, the staircase, the skylight, at the Big Box and the materials that comprised the Jewel Box – conformed to already existing ideals of museum architecture. The process was intended to work towards the legitimation of the museum-going experience as well as the legitimation of the institution. The symbolic codes that were in play at the art museum supported the legitimation/popularisation dichotomy and were derived from ideals of the institution of the art museum. However, although in a museum context the symbolic codes legitimised the art museum compared to the casino, when seen from the perspective of Las Vegas casino architecture, the academic pretentions of the art museum emphasised the genuine nature of the casino. The Guggenheims used architecture to mediate the ways that visitors thought about their visit and the art museum institution in the casino context, however, its imagined visitor was a tourist to the city. The next chapter will consider how another art museum in the city used ideals of publics as a way to communicate its legitimacy.

Chapter 3

The Las Vegas Art Museum: Curating communities and publics

Fig. 1 The main entrance of the Sahara West Library, Las Vegas

1. Introduction: From a League to a Museum

In 1950 the casinos in Las Vegas, long suspected of having ties to organised crime, came under a federal investigation, called the Kefauver Hearings, that would eventually lead to greater regulation and drive out mob influence. That same year the Desert Inn opened. It would go on to be closely associated with Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack and be replaced by the Venetian. 1950 also saw the printing of the first edition of the *Las Vegas Sun*, marking another stage in the development of the city. Indeed in 1950 the city continued to grow rapidly with its population

increasing to 48,000 in that year.[1] However, in 1950 another event took place in the city, one which was not widely remarked at the time, or subsequently. In 1950 the Las Vegas Art Museum (LVAM) began life, initially as an artist's collective, the Las Vegas Art League. It set out to provide art classes and a place for its members to exhibit and over the years it slowly collected some of their works.

Under the direction of a group of local artists, the members of the League intended to "bring art exhibits to this community, to promote art education and to paint and study together."[2] The League was the first arts institution in Las Vegas and for decades was the only place where people in the city could engage with publicly displayed artworks. At this early stage, although without a permanent venue, the Art League asserted that it represented the community of Las Vegas and one of the earliest statements about its function was that it would "promote and encourage art in the community".[3] Engagement with community therefore was part of the founding ethos of the Art League and throughout its history the curators of the LVAM stated that it was a distinctly Las Vegan museum that served the inhabitants of the city. The LVAM produced many interpretative documents for its exhibitions and was located in a building created specifically to act as a counterweight to the casinos on the Strip. Therefore, its relationship to its imagined publics was markedly different from the casino art museums and more in line with the ways that mainstream art museums describe their connections to their publics.

Its vision of museum-going publics differed from the BGFA and the Guggenheim in Las Vegas for whom the focus was on tourists. The BGFA was described by its founder, Steve Wynn, as an attraction and had no outreach or community programmes. Plans to offer reduced ticket prices to the city's residents and encourage school visits failed to materialise.[4] Similarly, the

[1] Denton, Sally, Morris, Roger, *The Money and the Power*, London, Pimlico, 2001, Chapter 7
[2] The Founding of the Las Vegas Art Museum, undated, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[3] Las Vegas Art League, Art in the Community, 1952-53, Report #3, undated, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[4] Las Vegas Sun, 7 October 1998

Guggenheim in Las Vegas struggled to reach out beyond the Strip to residents in the city.[5] The location of the museum and the $15 admission charge deterred locals from visiting.[6] The financial modelling behind the Guggenheim's presence in the city was based on the attraction of tourists rather than locals.[7] As discussed in the previous cases studies, the casino art museums' relationship to tourism was problematic as tourism is frequently considered part of a commercialised, leisure-orientated industry and not commensurate with art museums' socially directed functions. Although the possibility of significant numbers of paying visitors was tempting the tourism-focus of the casino museums challenged their claims to legitimacy to which they responded with authenticating cultural capital signifiers.

This study will, therefore, build on the previous case studies by asking how conceptualising who art museums are for can be a legitimising signifier and part of a process of conferring distinction on the institution. Strategies to authenticate and legitimise the BGFA relied on the use of interpretation of aesthetic encounters, while the Guggenheim Las Vegas relied on the creation of recognisable art museum spaces to communicate its messages to visitors. The previous case studies considered signifiers relating to how visitors were encouraged to think and how they were encouraged to behave. This case study will focus on what the display of works of art revealed about who was expected to take part at the LVAM. It will ask what the choices of objects to display showed about how the LVAM sought to communicate its authenticity through connecting to idealised publics, and how did the imagined composition of these publics determine the institution's 'museum-ness'.

The question of exactly who might constitute the art museums' public at the BGFA and the Guggenheim was glossed over with grand statements about intentions to bring art to 'the

[5] Lieberman, Paul, Staying in Vegas? Not the Guggenheim, The Los Angeles Times, 19 April 2008;
[6] Letters: Make Museums Affordable, Las Vegas Sun, 11 October 2001
[7] Thomas, Kelly, The Guggenheim Downsizes, Artnews, February 2003

people'. Wynn was quoted as saying he wanted to reach "the masses,"[8] and introduce art to "a whole new world of people,"[9] while Sheldon Adelson, owner of the Venetian, said that, "If you can't bring people to your museum, bring your museum to the people".[10] Meanwhile, Thomas Krens stated that the goal of the Guggenheim in Las Vegas was to reach "the widest possible audience".[11] This kind of populism, as identified by the political theorist Robert Dahl, calls for understandings of 'the people' that may seem intuitive but are in reality a 'public' defined and constituted by those who claim to speak for them.[12] Yet claims for art museums to fulfil a social purpose through making art available to a wider range of potential visitors, are as old as museums of art themselves.[13] This chapter will ask how the LVAM utilised the term community when defining its mission and programmes and will question the role of community in the configuration of ideals of authenticity at the art museum.

When thinking about the people that visit art museums, academic writing frequently omits tourists and instead asserts that museums are expected to provide symbolic group representations for communities that are situated locally to the museum.[14] It is not just that museums are meant to service communities but they are often tasked with the representation of specific communities, or with the representation of the idea of community itself. From this perspective it is possible to describes museums as "mindful emblems of our communal intellectual strengths".[15] This version of art museums is one where they are sites which can bring together individuals and allow them to understand and express themselves as a community. Art

[8] Wynning Streak, The Irish Times, 13 February 1999
[9] Biggs, Melissa, Wynn's Showplace, Town and Country, 1 April 1999
[10] The Economist, Hangings in the Wild West: Contemporary Art in America, 4 August 2001
[11] Masterpieces and Master Collectors: Impressionist and Modern Paintings from The Hermitage and Guggenheim Museums, September 16 2001 – March 17 2002 Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2001, p.11
[12] Dahl, Robert. Democracy and its Critics, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989
[13] For instance, see Sandell, Richard, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality,* London, Routledge, 2002
[14] See for instance: Barrett, Jennifer, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* Chichester, Blackwell Publishing, 2011, Livingstone, Sonia On the relation between audiences and publics, in Livingstone, Sarah, ed. *Audiences and publics : when cultural engagement matters for the public sphere.* Bristol, Intellect Books, 2005, p. 18, Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, Audiences – A Curatorial Dilemma, Pearce, Susan, *New Research in Museum Studies: An International Series, Art in Museums*, London, The Athlone Press, 1995
[15] Carr, David, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions,* Oxford, Altamira Press, 2003, p. 59

museums, therefore, are presented as sites which both reflect and follow the communities they claim to serve. Alternatively, art museums are described as representing communities through the creation of spaces in which people can find commonalities.[16] As we have seen at the Guggenheim, authenticity can be defined in opposition to perceived inauthenticity. Therefore, art museums have also been described as spaces that aspire to create these commonalities through bringing together likeminded individuals who are seeking an alternative to the (false) contemporary world.[17] Art museums, therefore, are conceived of as authentic institutions that can serve communities, lead communities and create communities.

The history of the LVAM connects to traditions of thinking about the institution's mission in terms of engagements that serve, lead and create communities. In 1966 members of the League petitioned the city of Las Vegas for assistance in finding a permanent location and were offered three buildings located in Lorenzi Park. The park had previously been a Western-themed resort and had been purchased by the city in 1965 with the idea that it would be used for the benefit of the inhabitants of Las Vegas. The League combined two of the buildings into one for a gallery and converted the third building into classrooms.[18] The Art League, therefore, benefited from a civic project that was focused on providing amenities for Las Vegas residents rather than visitors to the city. It's new location showed that it intended to serve the inhabitants of the city, and at the same time provide a means for creating community identify, through the creation of a distinctly Las Vegan institution.

Once in Lorenzi Park, the League continued to address its publics in Las Vegas through the display and teaching of fine art. It gained non-profit status in 1974 and changed its name to the Las Vegas Art Museum (LVAM) to indicate this. However, despite the name change, until the early 1990's the LVAM struggled to attract significant numbers of visitors, from Las Vegas or

[16] Ferguson, Bruce, W. Exhibition Rhetorics, Material speech and utter sense, Greenberg, Reece, Ferguson, Bruce, Nairne, Sandy eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996
[17] Groys, Boris, *Art Power,* Cambridge Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2008
[18] Fox, William, *In the Desert of Desire,* University of Nevada Press, Reno, 2005, p. 51

elsewhere. Its most visible services remained art lessons, while the majority of the exhibitions it put on were of local artists.[19] For an institution that relied on ticket sales, poor attendance meant that funding was a problem. The 1984 Trustees' minutes record that the LVAM's budget for that year was only $20,000 with no money coming from the city, the county or the state. The minutes record that the museum survived on "donations, memberships and commissions on sales".[20] Funding was so tight that in 1988 it was possible for the director to report that publicity for a show was "better than normal" because the artist "did much of his own promoting".[21] Community engagement, therefore, had a financial, as well as social, aspect.

The fortunes of the LVAM were transformed in 1995 when it was offered space in the newly constructed West Sahara Boulevard Library, usually called the Sahara West Library (Fig. 1). Although not a new institution it was not only now a self-proclaimed museum, it was housed in a new building, and it appointed its first professionally trained curator, James Mann. Mann's curatorial decisions would materially affect the ways in which the LVAM addressed its imagined communities, not least through his championing of a new art movement of his own devising called Art after Post Modernism. The final director of the LVAM, Libby Lumpkin, abandoned Mann's nascent art movement and brought the art museum more into the mainstream of the US art world. However, both Mann and Lumpkin presented a perspective to the nation of Las Vegas that went beyond its geographic constraints and which obscured differing and sometimes competing narratives from within the city.

Art museums since their inception have sought validation through claims that they serve individuals, communities and society as a whole. This public service function continues to the present day with the American Association of Museums defining a museum as an institution that makes a "unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things

[19] The Founding of the Las Vegas Art Museum, undated document from University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[20] Report for the Year 1984 presented to the Trustees, undated document, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[21] Director's Report, 21 April 1988, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives

of this world".[22] The International Council of Museums' definition of museums also includes a public service element: "A non-profitmaking, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment"[23]. The roles that art museums play in society and their interactions with their imagined publics are therefore one of the key ways in which the art museum is defined.

Without visitors the interpreting and exhibiting of objects would make no sense. However, the relationship between art museums and their publics is often fraught and frequently unclear. Through its address to an imagined public an art museum may contribute to the definition of that public and in some cases even create a public through its public address. One of the deeply held and longstanding beliefs about the art museum is that it serves the public through the provision of access to works of art, and many within the museum sector believe in and continue to work toward achieving this goal. Yet the dynamic between institutions and publics is not always clear. Through the process of addressing and imagining publics an art museum may see itself as serving a public that it desires and creates. However, despite the frequent lip service paid to inclusivity, access and appeal to publics that might include anyone and everyone, art museums are more often than not perceived to be exclusive and elitist and serving only a public who have already identified themselves as respondents to the museum's address. Therefore, the exhibitions that were organised at the LVAM represented a visual symbol of the ways in which the curators conceived of their publics, which impacted on the kind of institution it aspired to be, and in turn fed back into their programming choices.

Archival material relating to the LVAM was made available via the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. These documents span the lifetime of the LVAM from its earliest incarnation as an

[22] American Alliance of Museums website: http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/whatis.cfm - accessed 22/6/2012
[23] International Council of Museums website: http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/museum-definition.html - accessed 22/6/2012

artist's league to its closure in 2009. Some of these documents, in particular the earliest ones, are minutes of board meetings, however, most were documents intended for public release, including exhibition material written by LVAM curators, revealing the messages that the art museum wished to send to its publics. This chapter also interrogates catalogues and other interpretive document produced by LVAM curators to explore their intentions and aspirations for the art that they chose to exhibit. As the LVAM was the 'local' museum and was intended to have a community function, this chapter also looks at the history, demographics and politics of the city to place the LVAM within its local context. Local press reports will also be used. The work of Bourdieu and Michael Saward will also be used to discuss the ways that art museums address their imagined publics.

Through a study of the LVAM, this chapter will examine the issues of how an art museum derives authenticity through claims to represent its community rather than through a defined personal experience or a specific architectural statement. The ways in which museums have related to their publics and how this has come to be seen as an authentic and legitimising function of all art museums will be discussed in the first section. The changing definitions of the ways that museum refer to those that they wish to address and the impact of display decisions on the addresses to desired publics will also be discussed. The ways in which the idea of community applies to the city of Las Vegas, and in particular the claims that there is no community, are the focus of the following section. The exhibitions put on under James Mann's Art After Post Modernism banner will be analysed in the next section, the imagined publics for these exhibitions will be discussed, as will the ways that they connected national to ideas the images of the city. Finally, the Las Vegas Diaspora exhibition, curated by Dave Hickey, will also be analysed, as will its relationship to community ideals.

This chapter, therefore, examines what declarations of working in the interests of communities reveal about the relationship between art museums and notions of publicness and, possibly more

importantly, what the use of the word 'community' obfuscates about the ways that this relationship is conceived by art museums. It will explore how these issues were manifested through programming and curatorial decisions at the LVAM. If these are vexed questions for any museum attempting to negotiate its relationship with those who may constitute its audience, benefactors or beneficiaries, then they are particularly so for a museum in Las Vegas, a place which is often said to have no community. How did the LVAM utilise given concepts of audience, public and community from accepted art museum discourse to confer authenticity in its efforts to define its publics, to define itself and to define its purpose?

2. Community engagement and museum representation

From the 19th Century, throughout the 20th Century, and into the 21st Century, art museums have claimed to represent the communities they wish to serve. The ways in which art museums conceive of those that visit, and even sometimes those that don't, have become important legitimising signifiers and have come to be understood as part of the 'natural' behaviours of all art museums. The concept that art museums are able to represent a public or community, and in so doing form values and forge a sense of belonging, is key to contemporary constructions of the role of the art museum.[24] However, as we have seen at the BGFA and Guggenheim Las Vegas, social engagement is not a universal function undertaken by all art museums, and other imagined communities may make up for an absence of local community representation. Nevertheless, although claims for community engagement have been interrogated, particularly in academic writing since the 1980s, it is now a widely expected component of museum functions and goals. A focus on community is supposedly motived by social purpose and is often understood as being in opposition to populism and can be manifested through exhibition choices or even through specific works of art, around which outreach or education programme are constructed. This section will explore the ways in which community activity has historically been central to art

[24] Boswell, David, and Evans, Jessica eds., *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 1999

museums, becoming a key legitimising function. However, the ways in which publics have been defined has evolved, in turn changing the ways that museums claim to represent and address them.

Perspectives on the impacts and utility of aesthetic engagements for the publics that museums wish to address are continually developing as the relationship between institutions and publics changes and, indeed, as definitions of who or what constitute these publics also change. Broadly, the ways in which art museums have claimed to address communities have changed from a universalising approach in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, to one that seeks to speak to a fragmented and differentiated population. In 2017, for instance, the Museum of Modern Art in New York announced its intention to show works by artists from countries under threat from President Donald Trump's proposed travel ban for Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.[25] This was the first time that MOMA had curatorially been seen to criticize a sitting US president. The decision was interpreted as politically inspired.[26] However, it was also a decision that was intended to speak to MOMA's publics, while at the same time attempting to define the museum's relationship to contemporary society and notions of publicness, citizenship and transnationalism. In this instance, the address served to define not just the groups that MOMA wished to speak to but also the museum itself. It was a form of address that acknowledged commonalities between the museum and its publics, that these can be expressed through curatorial decisions and that museums can be, and perhaps should be, social and political actors. However, it also asserted a worldview at odds with the US government and which would alienate sections of US society.

From the earliest public art museums, the institutions' ability to represent communities has been emphasised. The Louvre, an art museum whose influence on other art museums stretches

[25] Farago, Jason, MoMA Protests Entry Ban by Rehanging Work by Artists from Muslim Nations, The New York Times, 3 February 2017
[26] Halpern, Julia, MoMA Responds to Trump's Travel Ban Through Its Collection, The Art Newspaper, 3 February 2017

around the world, was formally opened to the public in 1793 with the intention that it should be available to all the people of France. The museum's opening was highly symbolic for the fledgling French Republic as it provided visible evidence that it was committed to principles of equality.[27] At the birth of the Louvre as a public art museum the ways in which its claim to representation was presented deliberately placed it as a symbol for the entire French nation. The claim that the collection, and hence the institution, could be representative of the nation rather than the monarchy was highly innovative. However, as the nascent French nation was conceived as a universalised group, so too did the museum imagine its public, which did not allow space for specific groups within it. In the same way, the National Gallery of Art in Washington was intended by its patron Andrew Mellon to represent the nation of the United States on the world stage, proving that the country was the equal of older, European, nations, and was not conceived of as addressing differentiated groups within the US.[28] At the same time, the intended publics for the National Gallery of Art were international as well as national, physically present within and also dispersed beyond its walls. A museum's publics may be those that visit but may also be those that do not.

The concept that there could be a single, national identity was manifested through the institution of the museum. The act of providing these ideals was intended to shape, as well as represent, the imagined national community.[29] By showing that they were willing and able to understand and appreciate the objects on view, visitors could feel a bond with fellow visitors who were presumed to be feeling the same. As access to museums was universal, the experiences of visitors was held to be the same for all sections of society. This universalising approach was conceivable as the experience of visiting was held to be the same for everyone. Engagement with works of art was also widely acknowledged to be improving, regardless of the visitor and few, if any, other types

[27] Duncan, Carol, Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship, in Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, D. eds., *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institute, 1991
[28] Kopper, Philip, *America's National Gallery of Art: A Gift to the Nation,* Princeton University Press, 2016
[29] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London Verso, 2016

of engagement were accepted. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Enlightenment view of universal aesthetic engagements, and of their positive nature, continues to be widespread in the museum sector. Indeed, much of art museums' claims for the impact of aesthetic experiences would make no sense without an understanding that everyone can engage with works of art.

National museums have sought to define or support their countries' identities and establish collective memories, while local museums have attempted to represent regional identities as well as connect to wider national standards of proprietary, culture and importance.[30] However, the isomorphism of art museum institutions, discussed in the Introduction, means that national museums set the rules of engagement. Therefore, when Matthew Pritchard, an assistant director at the Boston Museum of Fine Art claimed at the turn of the 20th Century that the institution was "for the public and not for any caste or section of it" he was following the universalising ideals of national art museums by describing the museum as being for everyone in Boston with no recognition that there might be differing types of engagement, differing levels of access, or different relationships to what was on view.[31] It was through encouraging people to come together in the same place that museums sought to represent their publics through the provision of communal ideals and ideas that encouraged a sense of common interest between visitors. These concepts of the power of museums to describe the identity of an entire nation remain as strong in the 21st Century as in the 19th, as can be seen in so-called 'culture wars' in Europe and the US where exhibitions, their meanings and the messages they communicate are fiercely debated.[32]

These debates are fuelled and problematised by questions as to what constitutes the publics that museums are addressing and how they communicate to them. 'Public' has been the foundational concept for museums and their collections being open to all rather than the property of private

[30] Boswell, David, and Evans, Jessica eds., *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 1999
[31] Quoted in Wallach, Allan *Exhibiting Contradiction*, Boston, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, p. 52
[32] Lukes, Timothy, W., *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002

collectors in private spaces. Despite the long association of US art museums with systems of patronage and finance, art has come to be seen in the US as a shared property, the enjoyment of which is something that all citizens have a right to take part in equally.[33] As described by Carol Duncan, the role of the museum in the United States has traditionally been described as encompassing public service as it collects, preserves and exhibits object for the public. This was a deliberate position taken by 19th Century American art museums because it enabled them to pose as democratic institutions, hence legitimizing their actions as being for everyone.[34]

Frequently an art museums' democratic credentials are 'proved' by reference to its public access, that is how it promotes citizenship by allowing people access to works of art that are described as being held in trust for the nation.[35] Hence, the art museum in America can be described as representing "the triumph of American democracy," through the provision of culture for all citizens and through an ethos of public service.[36] The ICA Boston, for instance, claims in its mission statement to be working, "at the intersection of contemporary art and civic life, a museum that amplifies the artist's voice and augments art's role as an educator, incubator and convenor for social engagement."[37] In to the 21th Century it has remained possible for a museum director to describe the mission of his institution as being "to serve … the public for whom we hold the artistic heritage of mankind".[38] This vision of art museums maintains a belief that they are for all people equally. However, the lack of influence on museums from outside groups, or the push-back when groups attempt to influence art museums, puts these democratic claims into question.

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[33] Einreinhofer, Nancy, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, London, Leicester University Press, 1997; Carr, David, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions*, Oxford, Altamira Press, 2003; Harrison, Julia, Ideas of Museums In the 1990s, Museum Management and Curatorship, Vol. 13, No. 2, June 1994

[34] Duncan, Carol , *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London, Routledge, 1995

[35] Carrier, David, *Museum Skepticism, A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*, London, Duke University Press, 2006

[36] Einreinhofer, Nancy, *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, London, Leicester University Press, 1997, p. 32

[37] Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Strategic Plan: https://www.icaboston.org/about/strategic-plan - accessed 7/2016

[38] Cuno, James ed., *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p.77

In the 1960s art museums in the US began to be conceived as no longer representing a fixed and universal public, but were instead seen as being potentially at the very centre of efforts to engage with a diverse and multicultural society. Nevertheless, as shown by The Harlem on My Mind exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1968, art museums struggled to navigate the complex political and social issues relating to contemporary US life. The exhibition highlighted the problems, still acute in the 21st Century, of addressing contemporary issues that alienate existing audiences while failing to attract the desired new publics. Both the exhibition and the museum's director, Thomas Hoving, were disparaged by the museum's more 'traditional' constituents, with one art critic lamenting that it had "for the first time politicised the Met".[39]

Crucially, the Met was also criticised by the African-American community of Harlem for failing to adequately consult with members of the Harlem community during the planning stages and for the museum's refusal to include works of art by Harlem artists, instead including only photography.[40] The exhibition represented a, perhaps tacit, acknowledgment that in fact the museum did not represent every section of society and that it should do more to engage with communities geographically close to it that did not feel welcome. However, in the case of the Harlem on My Mind exhibition, the institution's claims of representation were not accepted either by its regular audience or by the community that it was, specifically, claiming to represent. Controversies such as those at the West As America and the Enola Gay exhibitions, both at the Smithsonian, show how fraught the relationships between museums and their publics can become and how representational claims do not always find their publics.[41]

At the end of the 20th Century, calls for greater social engagement at art museums garnered academic support, which in turn helped to inform new museum practices that aimed to engage

[39] Burt, Nathaniel, *Palaces for the People: A Social History of the American Art Museum*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co, 1977, p. 7
[40] Cooks, Bridget, Black Artists and Activism: Harlem on My Mind (1969), in American Studies, Vol 48, No. 1, 2007
[41] Lukes, Timothy, W., *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002

with visitors differently from the universalizing exhibitions of previous centuries.[42] The writing around this change, called the New Museology after the book of the same name, advocated multiple ways of interpreting the world and its history through museum displays, and emphasized the importance of engagement with communities, in particular in devising exhibits.[43] Consistently, over the past four decades, concerns about greater participation from a more diverse set of 'communities' in museums have preoccupied many museums practitioners and the term community has become more widely used to express a desire that art museums become more socially engaged.[44]

The term used most frequently at the LVAM to refer to the people who visited or who might visit was 'community'. However, the concept of community is slippery and used in different contexts. For instance, when curator and museum director Charles Esche says that, "there is a duty that we have to be accountable to the community of artists which we're not just working with, but the community of artists and the community of your audience who actually come to your institution,"[45] he is imaging a community of likeminded people (artists and museum professionals) as well as a wider community of people who engage with the work of the first two groups. In this instance the word community is used, not just for separate groups, but also for groups that engage, and are engaged with, differently.

The prevailing notion of community is that it is a phenomenon arising through choice. According to Raymond Williams it is,

> "the warmly persuasive word (used) to describe an existing set of relationships or the warmly persuasive word (used) to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important perhaps is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation,

[42] Bourdieu, Pierre & Darbel, Alain, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997

[43] Vergo, Peter, ed., *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Books, 1989

[44] Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, D. eds., *Exhibiting Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institute, 1991; Sandell, Richard, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality,* London, Routledge, 2002

[45] Hiller, Susan and Martin Sarah eds., *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation,* Baltic, 2003, p. 67

society etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term".[46]

The most commonly understood meaning of the word is that it can be defined in terms of place.[47] David Lee and Howard Newby, however, define community in terms of interest, or an 'elective' community, that is people who share a common characteristic other than place. Groups can be linked together by factors such as religious belief, sexual orientation, occupation or ethnic origin. Examples might be 'the 'Catholic community', 'the gay community', or 'the Chinese community'.[48] The opening out beyond geography of the conceptual space within which forms of community can be understood has allowed sociologists to define 'elective groups' and 'intentional communities', ranging, from on-line communities to train spotters, as key features of contemporary life.[49] Yet another way to consider communities, which is apparent in the founding of the Las Vegas Art League, is as communities of practice. These are groups of people who engage in collective learning through regular interaction – in the case of the LVAM through making and appreciating works of art.[50]

The different ways of approaching community can also overlap in particular instances. Place and interest communities may well coincide, such as in the case of places where many of those who live there, work in the same industry. For some sociologists, communities are best approached as 'communities of meaning', where 'community' plays a crucial symbolic role in generating people's sense of belonging.[51] Alternatively, the reality of community has been described as a purely symbolic construct, developing from its members' perception of the vitality of its culture.[52] Community can, therefore, be understood as a way of thinking about a group which

[46] Williams, Raymond, *Keywords,* Fourth Estate, London, 2014, p.6
[47] Wilmott, Peter, *Community in Social Policy,* London, Policy Studies Institute, 1984
[48] Lee, David, and Newby, Howard, *The Problem of Sociology: An Introduction to the Discipline*, London, Unwin Hayman, 1983
[49] Hogget, Paul, *Contested Communities: Experience, struggles policies*, Bristol, Policy Press, 1997.
[50] Wenger-Trayner, Etienne and Beverly, Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction, 15 April, 2015
[51] Crow, Graham and Allen Graham, *Community Life,* London, Wheatsheaf, 1994
[52] Cole, Anthony, *Symbolic Constructions of Communities,* London, Taylor and Francis, 2015

shares a common location, about groups which share a common interest, practice or characteristic or those who share a common emotional bond to a place or ideas. Through the process of seeking to engage with some or all of these groups, art museums come to define themselves and equally, through defining what kind of art museum they want to be, the types of publics who are addressed by the museum are created. This process does not occur in a linear fashion but does so simultaneously with each element a necessary part of the process.

In the later part of the 20th Century, community engagement at art museums was most frequently conceived of as having an educational component.[53] Yet, increasingly the role of curators and their decisions about programming and display have come to be considered just as vital. As pointed out by Andrew McClellan, the work of curators in exhibitions and museum programming can reveal the collective values and aspirations of the population that they aim to serve.[54] The traditional role of the curator has been that of judging the quality of one work or artist against another and preserving the works in the institutions they work for. This has now altered with the advent of evolving ideas around art museums' roles in creating, representing or defining groups or collective identities. Instead, the modern curator now acts as an interface between the institution, audiences and artists.[55]

However, the shift in the role of curator towards one that is closer to the production of art, and away from carer of objects or educator, is affecting the relationship between exhibitions and the wider public as the intended audience narrows to those that already interested or informed.[56] The domination of museum professionals, in particular curators, in exhibition decisions threatens to censure and regulate knowledge as the imagined publics become other museum professionals,

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[53] Lumley, Robert, ed., *The Museum Time Machine,* London, Routledge, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, *The Educational Role of The Museum,* London, Routledge, 1999

[54] McClellan, Andrew, *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008

[55] Graham, Beryl and Cook, Sarah, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2010

[56] O'Neill, Paul, The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse, Rugg, Judith and Sedgwick, Michele eds*., Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol, Intellect Books, 2007

curators, academics and those with pre-existing interests.[57] To counter some of these tendencies, the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) has started to pursue a 'user-led' philosophy that seeks to connect curatorial decisions to visitor's concerns about their lives.[58] MIMA is attempting to shift the focus of its relationship with its publics so that they will take a more active part in decisions about what is displayed.

This is a radical break from traditional art museum practice where curators decide on what is displayed and very rarely instigate any consultations with people outside of the museum world. At MIMA the use of the word 'community' has been replaced with 'constituency' and many curatorial decisions have been made in collaboration with community groups which in turn supports and justifies the museum's claims to represent its community/constituency.[59] This adventurous approach calls into question broad claims to represent communities by replacing the claims with actions. Time will tell if this approach can satisfy all of the groups that might be interested in the museum while at the same time maintaining a geographic cohesion and satisfying curatorial desires for sector acclaim.

An alternative word to community that was used by the LVAM was 'public'. According to Jennifer Barrett, the term 'public' is often used to invoke a generalised body of people, "an audience, a represented community or certain non-visitor interest group," and, like community it is employed to claim that the museum is a democratic institution for and of 'the people'.[60] Although there may be little difference between the uses of 'community' and 'public' both are often contrasted with audiences. The difference between publics and audience is often portrayed as "rational versus emotional, disinterested versus biased, participatory versus withdrawn, shared

[57] Pollack, Griselda, Un-Framing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility, Pollack, Griselda and Zemans, Joyce, eds. *Museums After Modernism*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 25
[58] Harris, Gareth, Mima's Senior Curator describes museum's 'user-led' philosophy, Museums Journal, 9 November 2015
[59] Byrne, John, Morgan Elinor etc., eds., *The Constituent Museum,* Valiz, 2018
[60] Barrett, Jennifer, *Museums and the Public Sphere,* Chichester, Blackwell Publishing, 2011, p.1

versus individualised, visible versus hidden".[61] At art museums this dichotomy is often expressed as between conceptions of an engaged and intellectually driven public and audiences who are considered and treated as measurable consumers. This differentiation is perfectly expressed by Eileen Hooper-Greenhill who divides visitors to the museum between tourists who are satisfied merely by "walking through the galleries for an hour or so," and publics who are made up of local residents whose requirements are deeper and more demanding.[62] Art museums, therefore, in their claims to represent communities are claiming to represent not only all the people who might visit but also defining particular types of engagement supposedly undertaken by types of groups as legitimate and authentic. As we saw at the BGFA and the Guggenheim Las Vegas, tourist experiences struggle for legitimacy at the art museum amidst concerns that they are populist and lacking in beneficial outcomes.

Through using terms such as publics or communities art museum intimate that they are focusing on particular, sometimes local, groups and addressing themselves largely to them. Thus, the mission statements of many US art museums refer to their aims in terms of education, preservation and exhibition for the benefit of the 'public'. Here the terms 'public', 'community' or 'audience' are often interchangeable and mutually affirmative of each other. They refer to the institution acting to "create a sense of community,"[63] or "to serve the public"[64] or "enriching lives"[65] by engaging with a diverse and broad audience. Although all these terms have different meanings and there are important differences between creating, serving and enriching communities, art museums continue to describe their functions as impacting positively on

[61] Livingstone, Sonia On the relation between audiences and publics, in Livingstone, Sarah, ed. *Audiences and publics : when cultural engagement matters for the public sphere.* Bristol, Intellect Books, 2005, p. 18
[62] Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, Audiences – A Curatorial Dilemma, Pearce, Susan, *New Research in Museum Studies: An International Series, Art in Museums*, London, The Athlone Press, 1995
[63] Mission statement Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: http://mcachicago.org/info/about/overview - accessed 3/2015
[64] Mission statement of the Los Angeles Contemporary Museum of Art: http://www.lacma.org/overview#ms, and the Boston Museum of Fine Art: http://www.mfa.org/about/mission-statement accessed 3/2015
[65] Mission Statement Phoenix Art Museum: http://www.phxart.org/visit/index.php#about – accessed 3/2015

definable groups of people. The belief that museums can and should speak to, and for, communities, remains unshakeable.

How might we understand the consequences of the ways in which museum institutions imagine their publics? Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural capital provides a framework for thinking about this process. Although Bourdieu was largely concerned with the relationships between individuals and class groups, as we have seen in the Introduction, institutions are also actors in this process. At the core of the interactions between art museums and social groups are ideals of 'taste' from which comes distinction. For Bourdieu, the demonstration of 'taste' is not neutral but rather is a form of social orientation: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier".[66] 'Taste' according to Bourdieu, derives from unequal distributions of forms of knowledge and cultural capital.[67] This uneven distribution serves to place museums in controlling positions with regards to the distribution and dissemination of cultural capital. As institutions that control what can be viewed and are arbiters of taste, museums both create cultural capital for those that engage with them as well as accrue cultural capital to themselves.

As taste serves to define and separate social groups, for Bourdieu, culture and taste are central to understanding the ways in which power is used to engender a "sense of one's place" which leads individuals and groups to exclude themselves from goods, places and events rather than be actively excluded.[68] The creation of habitus, that is socially ingrained skills, habits and dispositions, works by adjusting expectations to life-worlds as well as life chances. Although , Bourdieu is most interested in class groups, the definition, and self-definition of any social group relies on mastering an understanding of symbols and objects, words and gestures, which together comprise the definition of the particular group.[69] Hence, cultural practices and artefacts denote underlying status distinctions, serving as subtle yet powerful forms of social distinction, such that

[66] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 6
[67] Ibid.
[68] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010, p 471
[69] Le Wita, Beatrix, *French Bourgeois Culture,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994

good taste emerges as a means of exercising symbolic power in its own right. In this light, the decisions around which artefacts are displayed in art museums, and the ways in which the institutions imagine the impacts of these objects, become important and influential in the definitions of social groups.

Bourdieu argued that social space can be conceived of as a set of social 'fields' characterised by the unequal positions of social agents as well as institutions.[70] Therefore, the 'actors' in the social sphere may be individuals, groups or institutions. However, he also points out that it is wrong to consider groups or institutions as homogenous. Struggles occur between institutions for material profits as well as for symbolic profits.[71] Fields can thus be viewed as both the basis for, and product of, the competitive struggles that take place in social spaces. Therefore, Bourdieu's theory of distinction is not a static and deterministic construct but is a dynamic system that depends upon the behaviours of actors within fields. Indeed, fields can be thought of as spaces of possibilities where the relationships of actors is governed by the ways that the actors define how they relate to each other. Therefore, the ways that art museums imagine their publics and the works of art that they believe will connect to them not only seek to define those that visit but also define the institutions themselves in relation to other institutions.

Furthermore, as Michael Saward's work in the political sphere suggests, for art museums it is the claims to represent publics, communities or audiences that are more important than the validity or actuality of the representation.[72] Representational claims by art museums are double claims, whereby they suggest that they can represent a group as a group, while at the same time constituting the group through its representation. Thus, in ways similar to understandings of public address, a museum's claim to represent a community contributes to definitions of the constituencies of a community and at the same time is recognition of the existence of a

[70] Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic, *An Invitation to Reflective Sociology,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992 pp. 98-104
[71] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Science of Science,* Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004
[72] Saward, Michael, *The Representative Claim,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010

community. Therefore, the representational claim can hide the ways in which the institutions themselves are influencing or directing the debates around what is represented and to whom. Bourdieu, in *Distinction,* points out that the supposed universality of aesthetic engagements at art museums cannot explain the lack of diversity in audiences and is rather, a way to mask the uses to which institutions put their cultural capital.[73] In differing academic disciplines Saward and Bourdieu conclude that statements of intent can obscure motives and actions.

The representational claim also asserts the art museum's capability to understand communities and that through representing them it can effect change. The very act of claiming that there is a community that can be represented works to define the community, potentially in ways that are determined by the institution rather than by those constituted in the group. However, there are limits to how far definitions of communities can go. In 1990 a travelling retrospective of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe was slated to open in Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center but instead the art museum was taken to court for obscenity.[74] The curatorial choices to show Mapplethorpe's photographs were an address to a public of art lovers which assumed that they would have been unfazed by depictions of homosexual sex. However, the views of other inhabitants of the city were not fully understood nor addressed in the exhibition. Programming decisions are frequently much less disruptive, but nonetheless are indicative of the audiences that are addressed, such as the recent announcement by Tate Modern that it would focus its new Boilerhouse galleries on art from outside Europe and art by women. The decision to broaden the range of artists represented was presented by the museum as part of its universalising mission,[75] however, it was also described in the Telegraph as an attempt to "abolish not just art history, but history in general".[76] The question, particularly for a national institution, arises of for whom exhibitions are intended and how do they represent potentially differing communities.

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[73] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010
[74] Hickey, Dave, *The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty,* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2009
[75] Brown, Mark, New Tate Modern: more women, more diverse, more macaws, The Guardian, 14 June 2016
[76] Hudson, Mark, How the new Tate Modern wants to abolish history, The Telegraph, 15 April 2016

Art museums are not neutral actors in the process of community definition, but are active participants that seek to work with communities in part to legitimise claims to serve the public and enrich lives. These claims are key to giving art museums a purpose beyond the storage and preservation of objects and are used to counter claims that art museums are elitist. Yet the ambiguities of the term community enables art museums to use the term in multiple ways and at the same time allows the interpretation of its usage to serve multiple groups. The ways in which art museums have sought to define their publics have contributed to the ways in which they define themselves, and hence influence the kinds of experiences and engagements they offer. The universalising view of 19th Century art museum publics has changed so that 21st Century art museums conceive of their publics as diverse and multifaceted. Yet this has not meant that all art museums have abandoned concepts of the public, the people or even the nation. The tensions and contradictions in the ways that art museums relate to their publics are manifest through their curatorial decisions. The provisions of engagement with art through programming choices reveal the ways that art museums conceive of, and possibly contribute to, the publics they wish to serve while at the same time legitimising the institution through providing evidence that they are fulfilling their authentic functions.

3. An art museum in a library in Las Vegas

As discussed above, the ways that art museums engage with communities, claim to represent them and thereby address their imagined publics have become understood as part of the natural function of the institution. Representing communities, often imagined as geographical, is an aim of the art museum that provides legitimation through demonstrating that the institution is working for the public benefit, despite these concepts rarely being specifically defined. However, Las Vegas has a very particular and unusual character, and is portrayed both within the city and across the US as a place inimical to the formation of communities. Both advocates for and critics of the city have portrayed it as a place that, due to its focus on tourism and commercialism, as

well as the transient nature of its population, cannot support communities in the ways that other cities do. This section will examine these claims and describe the earliest days of the LVAM in the Sahara West Library, a place built to encourage community engagement.

While not the only US city to see rapid growth through migration, the city of Las Vegas, as in so many other areas, represents extremes in terms of community. It has been described as a city with "a million-plus rogue individuals clamouring for common goals or common ideals to have things, but without the support of a community".[77] Typically anti-authoritarian, Dave Hickey describes the very notion of community as being about exclusion and praises Las Vegas as being a place without a community which enables its many immigrants to establish themselves.[78] Hickey's "raw democracy" favours the market over the academy as for him success in the market indicates greater popularity.[79] The high rate in both immigration and emigration in the city has, according to economists and sociologists such as Lawrence Mullen [80]and Jerry Simich,[81] made it difficult for strong communities to form in the city. According to Billy Vassiliadis, a Las Vegas businessman,

> "The community is tiered and fragmented. We don't have a real community culture the way cities that have been around for a long time have. Every other community has something that they hang their hat on – something they own and have had for a long time. We don't have that".[82]

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[77] Dayvid Figler in Mullen, Lawrence J. ed. *Las Vegas: Media and Myth,* Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007, p.119

[78] Dave Hickey quoted in Mullen, Lawrence J. ed. *Las Vegas: Media and Myth*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007, p. 120

[79] Crosby, Gregory, High Thoughts in Low Places: Adventures in Raw Democracy with Las Vegas Art Critic Dave Hickey, Scope 25 Jun – 14 July 1998

[80] Mullen, Lawrence J. ed. *Las Vegas: Media and Myth*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007

[81] Simich, Jerry, Wright, Thomas, eds., *The People of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces,* Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2005

[82] Billy Vassiliadis, quoted in Mullen, Lawrence J. ed. *Las Vegas: Media and Myth*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007, p. 127

David Putnam's re-potting theory, whereby mobile and transient populations struggle to put down roots and therefore lack strong communities is very relevant in a city such as Las Vegas.[83]

The population of Las Vegas is far from static, either in terms of its composition or its numbers.[84] It is one of the fastest growing cities in the US and has been for at least three decades. In 1940 there were 8,000 residents of Las Vegas. In 1998, when the Bellagio opened, the population of the Las Vegas metropolitan area, comprising Las Vegas, Henderson, North Las Vegas, Boulder City and areas managed by the county was 1,225,200.[85] In 2010 the population of the Las Vegas metropolitan area stood at 1.9 million.[86] This staggeringly rapid growth has been fuelled by rapid migration to the city from across the US and increasingly Latin America. Many bank and casino employees wear nametags that state their first name and the city from which they come, as these are seen as the most important defining factors in a city where almost everyone has come from somewhere else. In cities such as Las Vegas, that attract a large number of immigrants and whose image plays such a significant role in the national consciousness, it is easy for the idea of the place held by non-residents to become more important to recent arrivals than the communities' own experiences of the place.[87]

One of the most conspicuous ways in which Las Vegas differs from other US cities is its reliance on tourism and gambling. In Clark County the tourism industry makes up approximately 90% of the economic activity and therefore, although the public sector is devised and run along nominally democratic precepts, it takes the interests of the gaming industry into consideration ahead of others.[88] Many public sector representatives emphasise the importance of the tourism

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[83] Putnam, Robert, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2001
[84] Gottdiener, M., Collins, Claudia, C., Dickens, David, R., *Las Vegas: The Social Production of An All-American City,* Massachusetts & Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999, p. 94
[85] Las Vegas Population Statistics, Sunset Cities.com http://www.sunsetcities.com/lasvegas/las-vegas-numbers-population.html
[86] Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century,* New York & London, Routledge, 2003, p.124
[87] Gottdiener, M., Collins, Claudia, C., Dickens, David, R., *Las Vegas: The Social Production of An All-American City,* Massachusetts & Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999, p. 213
[88] Ibid.

industry for ensuring high employment and above average income levels as well as for funding the majority of public expenditure through tourist taxes.

> "People within the community recognise the importance of tourism to the Nevada economy, because it generates not only a lot of business but also a lot of tax revenue for the state, and so there's kind of a common bond in the local community that revolves around the importance of protecting tourism, of attracting tourism, and Las Vegas has, over the years, developed kind of a can-do-attitude… and here a decision is usually made pretty rapidly,"

according to Bill Bible of the Nevada Resort Association (a representative of private business).[89] Hardly a decision is made contrary to the will of the resort industry except for the licensing and monitoring of gambling venues.

However, gaming influence also extends to campaign financing for the office of mayor and the Clark County commissioners thus adding a further layer of influence over political decisions. Oscar Goodman during his mayoral election campaign in 1999 criticised the gaming industry for abandoning Fremont Street and downtown Las Vegas for the Strip, and won by a very small majority. However, by championing Las Vegas as a tourist destination through his chairmanship of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Association (the city's corporate sponsored tourist board) he was able to gain gaming industry support and was re-elected by a landslide in 2003.[90] The preponderance of casino interests in the city has been identified as undermining the establishment of deep-rooted communities.[91] According to Dayvid Figler:

> "A lot of people have a lot of money and a lot of power and they just don't know what to do with it. They're not focusing it into community building. . . more energy's put into

[89] Schmid, Heiko, *Economy of Fascination: Dubai and Las Vegas as Themed Urban Landscapes*, Berlin, Gebruder Borntraeger, 2009, p. 133
[90] Ibid., p.124
[91] Denton, Sally and Morris, Roger, *The Money and the Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America* 1947 – 2000, London, Random House, 2001

> power brokering and things of that nature than making community or enhancing communities. Maybe that's because there's no real community to embrace."[92]

In fact, there is much evidence to contradict the view of Las Vegas as a place with no community. There are hundreds of clubs and associations from the small, such as the Non-smokers Pinochle Group and the St. Andrews Society of Southern Nevada, to the huge, such as the Culinary Workers Union which had a membership of nearly 50,000 in 2000.[93] Not only are voluntary groups thriving but ethnic groups, another definition of community, are also increasing in the city. The 2000 census of Clark County recorded 302,000 people who marked their ethnicity as Hispanic – a 217% increase since the previous census in 1990.[94] The census also recorded increases in immigrants from Europe, as well as people who identified themselves as having come from specific parts of the United States, most notably California. Community ties also form in relation to neighbourhoods. A survey in 1998 revealed that:

> "Six out of ten Las Vegans reported knowing at least a few of their neighbours by name and another 25% were on a first name basis with most or all of their neighbours. Furthermore, 71% reported helping a neighbour with a problem, 62.4% had watched their neighbour's property when they were out of town and 42.3% had borrowed tools or food items from a neighbour".[95]

Despite the image of the city as rejecting notions of community, life in Las Vegas need not be one of atomisation, and its inhabitants are striving to make connections to each other and create places and spaces to meet.

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[92] Dayvid Figler, quoted in Mullen, Lawrence J. ed. *Las Vegas: Media and Myth*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007, p. 119

[93] Simich, Jerry, Wright, Thomas, eds., *The People of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces,* Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2005; Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century,* New York & London, Routledge, 2003, p. 67

[94] Simich, Jerry, Wright, Thomas, eds., *The People of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces,* Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 14

[95] Gottdiener, M., Collins, Claudia, C., Dickens, David, R., *Las Vegas: The Social Production of An All-American City,* Massachusetts & Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999, p. 208

The LVAM's move to the Sahara West in 1995 firmly situated the institution within existing debates around the nature of community within the city. Not only was it a step towards bringing the museum credibility as a professional institution, it also connected the art museum to the goals of Las Vegas library construction. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was an extremely ambitious programme of library building in the city. Under the leadership of Charles Hunsberger, the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District was able to generate income through a fixed percentage of the tax base. As the population rose, therefore, so too did the taxes that were collected. Hunsberger had strong ideas of the purpose of libraries based on his belief that "a library is part of the community".[96] Hunsberger insisted that the libraries in Las Vegas should be designed to act as centres for local communities and therefore, as well as books, they included theatres, a public radio station (later moved to the Community College of Southern Nevada) and a children's museum, the Las Vegas Discovery Museum, which is still in existence and which still describes itself as "a critical community asset".[97]

For Hunsberger the libraries he commissioned were attempts to "define your culture and your people and your communities," through "civic buildings".[98] The creation of libraries, in particular ones which offered a variety of services, would, he believed, offer a counterweight to the prevailing notion that Las Vegas was a city without community. Although Hunsberger was eventually forced off the Library Board in 1992 after wrangles over the spiralling costs of library construction, the impact of his belief in the central role of libraries for the community of Las Vegas was incalculable. His vision of Las Vegas was of a city that was not defined by the Strip and which had demands that could not be met by casinos. If the gaming industry supported the idea of a city without community, the libraries firmly asserted that communities existed in Vegas.

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[96] Ibid., p. 165

[97] Discovery Children's Museum, History, https://www.discoverykidslv.org/about-us/ - accessed 11/2015

[98] Gottdiener, Mark, The Mundane and the Spectacular: Everyday life in Las Vegas, eds. Jaschke, Karin and Otsch, Silke, *Stripping Las Vegas: A Contextual Review of Casino Resort Architecture,* Weimar, University of Weimar Press, 2003, p. 46.

Libraries in urban environments have been portrayed as essential because they provide freely accessible public space. They enable "the site of battles between localism and globalism, the civic and the commercial, the material and the immaterial".[99] It is argued that public spaces that are accessible to all members of society are vital to the creation of communities and function as places for debates that define or prescribe attitudes to society.[100] For Sharon Mattern, the creation of public space, at a museum or in a library, allows for the development of communities as people meet and either discuss ideas or are presented with ideas in the form of art displays in an art museum and in the form of books at a library. Both these types of institutions therefore seek to represent geographically defined communities through their actions and, indeed, are believed to be active in the creation of communities. The creation of public spheres that encourage group development (and political identity) through the sharing of ideas and public debate, does not need the active involvement of libraries or museums. However, Hunsberger's vision for the Las Vegas libraries was of spaces that were non-commercial and thus could speak to different publics than the casinos.

In Las Vegas, in particular, the provision of public space is a much contested issue. As a city, it has less parkland per capita than any other city in the US, and it has few public swimming pools, sports grounds or other open spaces.[101] The cash-strapped municipal authorities in Las Vegas have systematically allowed casino owners to take control of previously public spaces such as roads and pavements. The provision of parks and gardens and in some cases the construction of schools and leisure facilities are undertaken in Las Vegas through private financing and hence these services are privately owned and controlled.[102] Against this backdrop, Hunsberger's library

[99] Mattern, Sharon, *The New Downtown Library: Designing with communities*, University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. x
[100] Groys, Boris, *Art Power,* Cambridge Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2008; Barrett, Jennifer, *Museums and the Public Sphere*, Chichester, Blackwell Publishing, 2011
[101] Rothman, Hal and Davis, Mike, eds., *The Grit Beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas,* Berkley, Los Angeles & London, University of California Press, 2002
[102] Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis – How Las Vegas Started the Twenty First Century*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 93

programme made a claim to represent the inhabitants of the city and was a conscious attempt to provide a counterweight to the influence of the casinos.

As part of the library's endeavour to represent the inhabitants of the city, the architecture of the Sahara West was also specifically intended to separate it from the dominant architectural styles of the Strip. The architect was Garth Rockcastle from a Minneapolis firm of architects. Rockcastle aimed to distinguish his building from popularised images of Las Vegas. "It's meant to stand in vigorous contrast," to the Strip he was quoted as saying.[103] Although Rem Koolhaas claimed that, "an entirely new architecture has been generated," at the Guggenheim in the Venetian, Rockcastle's, earlier building, also sought to derive its authenticity from its opposition to the perceived inauthenticity of the casinos. Rockcastle described the Sahara West Library as a "framing device," something to work in, wander through and eventually to look out from with a sense of wonder.[104] The architecture of the Sahara West, just as much as the contents, communicated to its visitors, who were intended to understand that it was an authentic piece of civic architecture that was part of the city rather than part of the Strip. The association of the architecture of the Sahara West to ideals of a city community gave it legitimacy as a community space that was intended for a community outside of the tourism of the casinos.

From the outset the intention was that the library would incorporate a museum, although Rockcastle's design would not reveal the building's dual function to passers-by as the museum was incorporated inside the library and had no separate architectural identity, much like the BGFA in the Bellagio. Any architectural messages that were conveyed were not specifically derived from the LVAM. The art museum took up 12,000 square feet, or a quarter of the library complex, with one main exhibition gallery consisting of 4,500 square feet of floor space and two smaller adjacent galleries of 1,500 square feet each. The space was described as "totally

[103] Stein, Karen, Myer, Scherer & Rockcastle's Sahara West Library and Fine Art Museum, Architectural Record, 1 March 1997, Vol. 185, No. 3
[104] Ibid.

inadequate" by a subsequent director of the LVAM, being too tall for the width of its exhibition sightlines and too small for major exhibitions. Equally problematic for an institution that would rely on income generation was that there was no space for a shop.[105]

Hunsberger's intentions were to create a place at the Sahara West Library, and indeed at the other twelve libraries built in Las Vegas during his tenure as director of the Library Board, that would act as centres for the community of Las Vegas and offer an alternative to the gaming industry. Therefore, the placing of the LVAM in a building which was intended to aid the development of community ties and a public sphere linked it firmly with Hunsberger's vision for the growth of strong communities through the creation of public spaces. Indeed, the history of the LVAM up to this point was also one in which its representational claim was one of supporting the community, mainly through art education. Once it had moved in to the Sahara West this "tradition of community service" was acknowledged in a press release about the move.[106] The newly located art museum was, according to its new director James Mann, intending "to present to its community and to its city visitors, a continuous schedule of ambitious fine-arts exhibitions…".[107] The linking of the art museum and the library was intended to benefit both institutions as the building was envisaged as a place that could be visited by all Las Vegas residents for a number of purposes and could be enjoyed in a number of ways.

The nature of Las Vegas's population which is mainly comprised of recent arrivals from across the US and beyond, the focus on the casinos on the Strip as providing the overriding image of the city and the portrayal of the city as a laboratory for social experimentation, have led Vegas to being described as being without community. This view of society fits the city's libertarian streak as it suggests that it is comprised of individuals rather than groups. However, this is more wishful thinking than an accurate portrayal of the lives of Las Vegans. The history of the libraries

[105] Fox, William, *In the Desert of Desire,* Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 56
[106] Press Release, 14 February 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[107] Mann, James, Las Vegas Art Museum, Mission Statement, 1997, University of Nevada archives

in Las Vegas points to a desire for communities, however defined, and a willingness to create the physical spaces in which communities might develop. The museum space at the LVAM was designed for and conceived as playing a role in developing a public sphere to support the city's communities. The LVAM, with its history of referring to its publics as 'community' and its purpose as serving that community, seemed to be imagining similar publics to those of the library. Significantly for a city which relies on tourism, tourists were not declared as the primary audience for the new art museum in the same manner as the art museums in the casinos. The ways in which community in Las Vegas was envisaged by the Sahara West, and the LVAM prior to moving to the library, specifically related to ideas of place and inhabitation. However, the ambitions of the LVAM were to grow once it was installed in its new home.

The creation of the library and the role that an art museum might play within it, are very much within the mainstream of expected art museum functions. Working for and with communities is a goal for art museums that is considered to be a legitimate part of their core values. Community engagement, as we have seen above, demonstrates the democratic intent of institutions as well as their social purpose. In a Las Vegas context, the LVAM, not only rejected the notion that the city was without communities but also that only populist approaches would be suitable in the city. The choices of art to exhibit would show how the art museum imagined its publics and wished to address them.

4. Art After Post Modernism: Attempting to put Las Vegas on the cultural map

The LVAM was dismissed as "a genteel, largely unambitious league of amateur artists" before its move to the Sahara West, which was recognised as the institution "making a play for the bigs".[108] The inaugural exhibition of the LVAM at the Sahara West Library was therefore important in establishing the character of the reborn museum. The exhibition was entitled Art after Post Modernism. Together with a new home, the LVAM also had a new curator, James Mann. Mann

[108] Dickensheets, Scott, Small Time Critic Checks Out Las Vegas Art Museum's Big Move, Las Vegas Sun, 18 February 1997

described the exhibition as introducing "a new growing international art movement" that "will determine the course of the fine arts into the 21st Century".[109] For the exhibition, he wrote a lengthy introduction which also appeared in its entirety at the entrance to the museum.[110] The self-described manifesto set out Mann's opinion of the state of the art world and his prediction as to its development. The centrality of Art After Post Modernism to Mann's vision was clear from his biography, sent out to local journalists ahead of the opening of the exhibition, which stated that he curated in accordance with his "formulation of this (after Post Modern) esthetic (sic)".[111] The first exhibition in the new location for the LVAM, under the direction of a new curator, was therefore highly ambitious and attempted to define a new art movement, and put the LVAM at its head. With these new goals also came a shift in the museum's conception of its publics.

Through an historically based textual analysis of public statements by Mann about his art movement, interpretative material for exhibitions at the museum and the works of art themselves, this section will examine Mann's promotion of his new art movement at the LVAM and the imagined publics that he wished to address. By claiming to be spearheading a new art movement and to be working for specific communities, the LVAM pursued functions and goals that are expected of museums. As discussed above, working for and with communities, and championing artists, are behaviours that are recognised as authentically of the art museum. The LVAM's institutional isomorphism, whereby it sought legitimacy through reproducing aspects of other institutions, supported its authenticity. This process, as we have seen at the BGFA and the Guggenheim Las Vegas, accrues symbolic cultural capital to institutions and shows that they are operating within the same field. In the case of the LVAM Mann was sensitive to both a national field (constituting other art museums and art lovers from around the country, as well as

[109] Mann, James, Art After Post Modernism, undated, University of Nevada archive
[110] Dickensheets, Scott, Small-time critic checks out Las Vegas Art Museum's big move, Las Vegas Sun, 18 February 1997
[111] King, Sharon, The Curator, Las Vegas Museum of Art, undated, University of Nevada archive

potentially interested donors) as well as a local field (comprising a geographically defined public of art lovers and the Vegas business community) and sought out a community of interest as well as a geographically defined community. His imagined publics would be inspired to travel to the city to see the Art After Post Modernism exhibitions, as well as from within the city itself.

Through associating itself with a new art movement, Mann committed the LVAM to the display of contemporary art rather than Old and Modern Masters as at the BGFA and the Guggenheim. The LVAM's decision to support contemporary, emerging artists was partly determined by its small budget, its lack of a signature building or a defined collection. However, it also allowed for a curatorial position that defined the institution mainly through its communications with and for its imagined audiences. As the artists that were shown by Mann were not part of the canon of art, had little in the way of national reputations, and were not from Las Vegas itself, visitors to the gallery could not be expected to have preconceived ideas of the art that they were going to encounter. The relationship between the artworks and art museum's publics could not rest on familiarity with the works or the artists. Instead, the creation of a contemporary art movement meant that the choice of works that were displayed revealed Mann's ideas, tastes and his imagined publics. Decisions as to what people will like, and what will be shown to them, that are taken by museum institutions without reference to the communities to which they aspire to speak are common, and the LVAM could be said to be behaving as other art museums in this regard.

For the new art movement, Mann made claims for a return to a more figurative approach to art, while at the same time acknowledging a broad range of cultural sources, references and techniques. Mann's manifesto set out his belief that successive art movements in the 20th Century had progressively stripped art of its forms, a process he describes, presumably after Lucy Lippard, as the 'dematerialization of art'. Therefore, for Mann, "The only valid direction available to them (artists) is to reclaim innovatively the lost and abandoned resources of

techniques and content in their different artistic disciplines".[112] From the manifesto it is not easy to grasp what the unifying features of this movement might be. For instance, he wrote that, "Painting after Post Modernism specifically, will include a great deal more stylistic variety within its single, coherent, overall esthetic (sic) variety, manifested in unlimited combinations of abstract, figurative, pictorial manners and modes than existed in any prior period in the history of art".[113] Mann's aspiration for this movement was that it would be "the art of the future".[114]

The first flagship exhibition to inaugurate the opening at the Sahara West, showed works by fourteen artists – Colin Dodd, Mark Anderson, Stephanie Bell, Marci Gehring, Ann Stoddard, Mark Mulfinger, Mary Walker, Carl Blair, Linda Fantuzzo, Eric Nord, Jay Watkins, Rex Barnes, Katryn Cohen and Jim Craft. At the time of the exhibition none of the artists involved had gained a national reputation, although most had exhibited in small mainly commercial galleries across the US. None has subsequently gone on to national or international fame, although most are still practicing artists. There was no geographic link between the various artists and they hailed from across the United States, although there was a preponderance of artists from the south eastern states where Mann is from. None of the artists in the exhibition, nor the works shown, had a connection to Las Vegas. It is not clear from the manifesto how the work of these artists would fulfil the LVAM's "tradition of community service".[115]

Stylistically, the artists in the exhibition were also extremely disparate. All the works were paintings on canvas and all contained some figurative elements, although some, such as those by Mary Walker, Ann Stoddard and Jay Watkins, contained more abstraction than others. There was a wide variety of subjects, including landscapes, allegories and in the case of works by Rex Barnes and Jim Craft, religious themes. Perhaps the most successful of the artists in the exhibition has been Carl Blair, although his success has been largely confined to his home state

[112] Mann, James, Art After Post Modernism, undated, University of Nevada archive
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Press Release, 14 February 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives

of South Carolina. In the introduction, Mann drew attention to the influences on some of the artists, notably Colin Dodd, Mark Anderson and Mark Mulfinger, of past masters such as Picabia, Derain or van Gogh.[116] However, it is also possible to identify stylistic influences from more recent artists, such as Rosenquist, Hockney or Johns, although in line with Mann's definition of Art After Post Modernism, this was not raised in his introduction. Mann described Art after Post Modernism as "a total exploration of expressive resources and possibilities, an entirely new manner and degree of incorporating and innovating many different kinds of artistic expression from the widest possible range of cultural origins and cultural levels".[117]

The following year, Mann curated Bob Guccione's, founder of Penthouse magazine, first one-man show. Before becoming involved in pornography, Guccione had trained as an artist and moved to Europe to pursue his artistic career. As coyly described by Mann in the catalogue to the exhibition, "Then he found a way to attain a sustainable income that would support his career as an ambitious painter".[118] According to Mann, Guccione was not only too busy with his business to engage in painting, but he was also deliberately sitting out the period of Post Modernism while he waited for his own artistic approach to regain dominance. Although a retrospective of the works of a pornographer in Las Vegas, a city that has long been associated with sex, located in the only state in the US that has legalised prostitution, might seem apt, Mann's perspective of the synergy between Guccione's art and the city was different. If Las Vegas is the inevitable home of Art after Post Modernism then, for Mann, Bob Guccione was an artist of key significance for the movement because he brought together concepts of interrelated symbols and images with a broad representational aesthetic.[119] Mann explicitly linked Guccione's art with Las Vegas, specifically with the city's casinos rather than is inhabitants and their experiences of living in the city. For Mann a formalist approach to understanding Guccione's

[116] Mann, James, Art After Post Modernism, undated, University of Nevada archive
[117] Mann, James, Art After Post Modernism, undated, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archive
[118] Mann, James, Vandal Vegas: Beauty and Bob Guccione, 1998, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archive
[119] Ibid.

painting made him an appropriate example for Art after Post Modernism rather than readings of the content of his work.

Postmodern art for Mann was an "analytical dismantlement of high art" which Art after Post Modernism would rectify by actively seeking out as broad a range of stylistic inputs as possible, as it "grasps, assimilates and employs more diverse cultural sources and resources than art has done heretofore, in previous ages."[120] Many of the artists shown at the LVAM during Mann's tenure as curator are described as drawing from a wide range of influences. Essie Pinsker's sculpture references "a bewildering array of culture-wide iconography: from Bernini to Brancusi; mythology to mummy case; Old Testament to New."[121] Painter Kay Danforth is described as a 'provincial' practitioner who has been influenced by, the seemingly contradictory, movements of Action Painting, Post-Painterly Abstraction and Colour-Field painting.[122] Robert Stone's work "masterfully taps into three rich veins in art history: the still life, the vanitas and the self-portrait".[123] The influences that Mann ascribed to these artists, relate to an engagement with and understanding of, the history of art. The ways in which these might relate to a community beyond an already existing community of interest are not explored by Mann. His imagined audience understands the cultural references and signifiers that he is using and does not need explanations, as were provided at the BGFA, of why they should be engaging with the LVAM exhibitions.

The new direction of the LVAM, moving away from exhibitions of largely local artists towards exhibitions with a national outlook, signalled that the art museum's imagined publics were also changing. Nevertheless, the LVAM continued to use the word community to describe the groups to which it was hoping to connect. Having moved to a new exhibition space, appointed a new

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Mann, James, Essie Pinsker and Sculpture Today, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[122] Mann, James, Kay Danforth: Painting Retrospective , February 3 – March 14 1999, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[123] Mann, James, Robert Stone: Lifetime Retrospective, March 17 – May 2, 1999, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives

curator and adopted a radical new programming strategy, the LVAM released a new Mission Statement.[124] In its last sentence Mann described the community that he envisaged the LVAM serving as the "artistic, cultural and economic community" of the city.[125] Unlike Hunsberger, the community Mann describes in the mission statement is not the entire community of the city but those that are already invested in art and culture. These would be people whose habitus and field meant that they already understood and valued the cultural capital that could come from visiting a museum. To these groups Mann adds the economic community of the city, without whose financial contributions the art museum could not survive. The explicit connection of the LVAM to the attraction of tourists to the city was undoubtedly a way to woo the city's economic community by giving the art museum a practical, measurable and financially beneficial purpose.

The deliberate association of an art museum with avant-garde contemporary art was not a tactic unique to the LVAM and James Mann. Mann acknowledged the influence of Alfred H Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York who is often credited with establishing many of the concepts of modern art curating and the study of contemporary art.[126] Through exhibitions and catalogues Barr sought to distinguish art which 'pushed forward' from art which did not.[127] Mann explicitly drew a parallel between the two art museums in his Curator's Message of 2000 saying that the LVAM intended to "carve out a definitive epoch-making place for itself in this new century, such as New York's Museum of Modern Art did with the art of the 20th century".[128] As with the claims by the BGFA to challenge the Frick Collection, and the unavoidable connection of the Guggenheim Las Vegas to its New York counterpart, the LVAM's likening of itself to MOMA, was intended to legitimise the art museum through association. He may also have been thinking about MOMA's visitor statistics, which show that

[124] Mann, James, Las Vegas Art Museum, Mission Statement, 1997, University of Nevada archive
[125] Ibid.
[126] Kantor, Sybil, *Alfred H Barr, Jr and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art,* Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002; Sandler, Irving, and Newman, Amy, eds., *Defining Modern Art: Selected writings of Alfred H Barr*, New York, Abrams, 1986
[127] Sandler, Irving, and Newman, Amy, eds., *Defining Modern Art: Selected writings of Alfred H Barr*, New York, Abrams, 1986
[128] Mann James, Curator's Message, Spring 2000

60% of its audience are from outside of the US, 25% were from elsewhere in the US and only 15% lived in the tristate area.[129]

Producing a manifesto for a new art movement is a very bold and defiant action for a new curator to take. However, there is precedent for this as well. For example, another West Coast curator, Walter Hopps, who had been an art dealer in Los Angeles in the 1950s and became a curator at, and later director of, the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon Museum) in 1962. Although Hopps did not coin a term for the artists he exhibited he was instrumental in bringing to prominence artists on the West Coast at a time when the US art world was firmly fixed on New York. He championed artists such as Ed Ruscha, Ken Price, Robert Irwin and Billy Al Bengston as well as his some-time business partner Ed Kienholz and organised the first exhibition on the West Coast of the Pop Art works of Andy Warhol. As explained in the Dictionary of Art Historians,

> "Los Angeles was practically without modern art representation, overwhelmed by New York. Hopps tapped into indigenous southern-Californian modernist art movements, exploiting them to the fullest and developing a serious contemporary art presence in Los Angeles".[130]

Hopps' tenure at the Pasadena Art Museum showed how a small art museum could rise to national prominence through the championing of contemporary art that had little presence in New York. The LVAM's strategy was bold but certainly not outside of the mainstream of art museums.

Mann's connection of the LVAM's strategy of identifying and championing contemporary art with that of MOMA reveals an ambition for the LVAM that went far beyond local or regional interests. Mann's appointment as curator was, at least partially, connected to his boosterish

[129] Tourists support the arts but not all, MetroFocus, 15 August 2012
[130] The Dictionary of Art Historians, http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/hoppsw.htm - accessed 20/3/18

attitude to Las Vegas and to the role that the LVAM could play in improving the image of the city to potential visitors. In the press release announcing his appointment, the future of the LVAM was described in terms that would not have been out of place in a financial report. The museum's growth was an "aggressive, ambitious bid," that would bring "continued economic diversification," through "profitable artistic expression".[131] The development of the city as a centre for exciting contemporary art was for Mann connected to the commercial success of the city through its continued encouragement of tourism. "Such audacious ambition and energy have always characterised Las Vegas and never more so than in recent years with major casino-resorts being built at a record rate," he wrote

He intended to replace New York with Las Vegas as the predominant art centre of the US. The press release continues: "For 300 years, this (art) center has kept moving west; from Rome to Paris to New York. Why can't Las Vegas be next? The Las Vegas Art Museum believes that this city can be, and is dedicated to the proposition of making that vision a reality".[132] Although the Sahara West Library, the LVAM's new home, was designed and conceived as offering an alternative to the Strip that would contribute to the forming of local communities, Mann's vision was not only national but it also positioned the art museum as playing a vital part in the city's tourism industry.

Mann intended the LVAM to play a leading role in transforming Las Vegas into a vibrant cultural centre, by being recognised worldwide in much the same way that the Norton Simon Museum is recognised today.

> "Mann believes that within five years of the recent opening of the new Las Vegas Art Museum – this is by the end of the year 2001 – and with the enlightened support of Las Vegas economic community, the city will be able to make seriously ambitious claims,

[131] Press Release, 14 February 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[132] Ibid.

based on actual accomplishments, as an important and innovative international centre of the visual arts."[133]

His Curator's Message, Spring 2000 declared that the LVAM, "has demonstrated its imaginative resolve to be a leading American institution through its contemporary exhibitions …the LVAM aspires to lead Las Vegas into a new era of fine-arts sophistication worthy of Las Vegas's continually growing reputation as a world class tourist destination city".[134] However, unlike Wynn's statements that the BGFA would attract people who had not previously visited art museums, Mann wanted his museum to become a destination for people that were already interested in art. Through offering signifiers of authenticity, the LVAM, could become the reason for art-lovers to visit the city rather than go to already existing art centres such as New York or Chicago.

Despite declaring that Art after Post Modernism was the successor to postmodernism, Mann's new art movement celebrated the same love of hybridity that is not only a feature of postmodernism but is also frequently described as a feature of the Strip and Mann, like many commentators on the city, equated Las Vegas with casinos. For him it was the ways that the casinos play with symbols, images and concepts that made the city a place that is "the unofficial world capital of this new movement in art".[135] "Per square foot," he said in 2000 after the decision to open the Guggenheim in the Venetian was announced, "Fremont Street and Las Vegas Boulevard probably have more artistic culture than anywhere else in the world".[136] For Mann, Las Vegas casino moguls, or "empire-builders" as he called them, created "an urban landscape filled with a cascading chaos of re-combined and elaborated building styles."[137] If the

[133] Mann, James, Las Vegas Art Museum, Mission Statement, 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[134] Mann, James, LVAM on art's innovative frontier, Curator's Message Spring, 2000, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[135] Ibid.
[136] Mann, James, Where I Stand: High Art in Las Vegas, Las Vegas Sun, 1 August 2000
[137] Ibid.

LVAM was to represent its local community, Mann believed, it should be through works that reflected the city's main industry and the new art movement would do this.

The conceptual link between Mann's art movement and the casinos in the city underpinned all of the shows that he curated under that banner. The art that Mann chose to display, therefore connected to the city via its thematic similarities to the casinos of the Strip, which he believed made Las Vegas the perfect location for Art After Post Modernism. The architecture of the casinos makes Las Vegas, "above all others most eligible to step forward as symbol and showcase of a new worldwide movement in the fine arts."[138] Through presenting the city as a potential cultural destination Mann supported the casino industry's aims of attracting tourists. Mann's curatorial decisions, therefore, expressed a view of the city that was aligned with the wider image of Las Vegas as a brash tourist destination. In effect he was attempting to present a particular image of the city reflected in the art he chose to display to a national audience that would have recognised this popular version of Vegas.

The creation of the Art after Post Modernism movement audaciously made a play for the LVAM to be at the head of a new wave of art and artists that would propel it to the lead role within the US. The concerns of this new movement, as expressed by Mann, were entirely art historical and aesthetically based. Just as Post Modernism has been criticised for being divorced from the lives of most people,[139] for representing only the concerns of middle class intellectuals[140] and for being "bollocks,"[141] so too could Art after Post Modernism. In this regard, as with many others, Mann's supposedly new art movement was difficult to differentiate from its predecessor.

Mann sought to position the LVAM as an engine of economic growth for the city through developing Vegas as a cultural centre. This vision of the LVAM was a radical break from the role

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138 Ibid.
139 Jameson, Frederic, *Postmodernism of the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* Duke University Press, 1991
140 Hebdige, Dick, Postmodernism and the Other Side, in Storey, John, ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader,* London, Pearson Education, 2006
141 Asbhee, Brian, Art Bollocks, in Art Review, April 1999

for the museum that Hunsberger envisaged. The deliberate creation of public spaces that were alternatives to the Strip and which were non-commercial, placed emphasis on the creation of civic values through shared experiences. However, Mann's vision involved the LVAM as an active participant in the tourist and casino industry and his curatorial choices reflected this. Hence, his imagined publics were not geographically defined in the way that Hunsberger's community was defined. Rather, Mann hoped to speak to a national public of art lovers, museum-goers and artists. Although he referred to 'the tradition of community service', through defining the role of the LVAM in terms of tourism the art museum projected an image that spoke more to those wishing to visit Las Vegas than those that lived in it.

From his public statements, Mann, therefore, aimed to represent a particular and widely held image of the entire city and not one of multifaceted, multicultural or overlapping communities. His vision for the city presented it as a centre for a brash, ebullient art movement that would chime with the ways in which the Strip is most frequently portrayed. At the same time, he specifically focused on groups which might have vested interests in the museum such as art lovers and the economic community. Thus, from Mann's articulation of the goals of the LVAM, he intended it to represent both the city in its entirety to groups beyond Vegas itself, while focusing on art lovers and businesses within the city. Just as local 19th Century arts institutions aspired to bring attention to, and increased pride in, the towns and cities in which they were situated, the LVAM aspired to do the same. In the 20th Century this civic pride developed into schemes for urban and economic growth most famously epitomised by the Guggenheim Bilbao.[142]

The communities described by Mann as being served by the LVAM were very much 'elective' communities. To already existing art lovers he added the economic community, dominated in Las Vegas by the casinos. By specifying his goal of gaining the support of the economic

[142] Miles, Malcolm, Limits to Culture: Urban Regeneration vs. Dissident Art, Pluto Press, London, 2015

community, the Mission Statement makes a play for financial support from the wealthiest section of Las Vegas's population. This is in keeping with the way in which US museums are funded, that is through soliciting donations from wealthy patrons and trustees. However, the use of the word community in this context softens some of the implications inherent in Mann's definition of the LVAM's communities as art lovers and wealthy interested parties as it implied that there was a social cohesion to these groups. The word 'community' in this instance was used ambiguously. It could have been interpreted as implying a civic connection between the city and the LVAM, but was also used to convey a more choice-based notion of interest groups. The word community in this instance was being used to imply that the LVAM would represent different interest groups with different concerns and desired outcomes. The ambiguity of its use allowed differing groups, both in the city and further afield, to relate to the museum's claim but also broke down the differentiation between the LVAM and the Strip that had been part of Hunsberger's mission.

Although Mann realigned the LVAM's imagined publics away from a definition defined through the geography of the city, the ambiguity of the meaning of community in a museum context meant that the LVAM could continue to claim its actions as legitimately of the idealised art museum. The LVAM was by no means the first art museum to claim to spearhead an art movement and Mann explicitly linked his museum to MOMA, one of the most well-known examples of this. Nor was the use of an art museum to attract attention to a place or city novel and, we have seen at both the BGFA and the Guggenheim Las Vegas. The role that culture can play in the regeneration of an area through the attraction of tourists is also well known.[143] The LVAM was undoubtedly acting in similar ways to other museums of art.

However, crucially, through refocusing the potential audience for the LVMA, Mann also repositioned how the art museum related to its publics. We have seen that, as pointed out by

[143] Atkinson, Rowland and Bridge, Gary eds. *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*, London, Routledge, 2005

Bourdieu, distinction cannot be neutral and derives from unequal distributions of forms of knowledge and cultural capital.[144] The LVAM attempted to create cultural capital for those that engaged with it (its imagined publics) as well as accrue cultural capital to itself. Although the LVAM did not try to actively exclude groups, its use of symbols and of the works of art chosen by Mann acted to define a public that was addressed which denoted status distinctions and acted as subtle but powerful forms of social distinction. The ways that the LVAM imagined its publics and the works of art that it believed would connect to them not only seek to define those that visit but also defined the institutions itself. Although the community claims for the LVAM under Mann may have presented the institution as having a community purpose that was universal, the ambiguities of the term community enabled the art museum to use the term in multiple ways, while in reality seeking to connect to ideals of the art museum that perpetuated distinction.

5. Las Vegas Diaspora: Vegas as a worthy outsider

Mann's tenure as curator of the LVAM came to an end in 2001. The museum's Executive Director, Joseph Palermo, who had appointed Mann, stepped down in February of that year and this opened the way for Mann to be replaced as well. Mann's experiment with a new art movement had failed and the LVAM had been overshadowed by the opening of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art and the Guggenheim Las Vegas. The city of Las Vegas had made an impression on the national art world through opening art museums in casinos and, although Mann was explicit about his strategy to use the LVAM as a way to attract tourists to the city, it was the packaging of culture as part of a wider commodified tourist experience that garnered attention from the US media. None of the artists championed by Mann gained national recognition and his art movement proved to be unable to speak either to or for his intended national public nor a local community. The LVAM was 'public' in the sense that it was open to all people. However, the curatorial decisions around exhibitions and display meant that although

[144] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010

the museum claimed to be representing communities or publics, in reality it could not constitute these groups through the force of its claims.

Mann's replacement, Marianne Lorenz, had previously worked at the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, Montana. For the next three years Lorenz would curate most of the exhibitions at the art museum. Under Lorenz the museum started to show older works. The LVAM entered into an association with the Smithsonian and was able to show Gilbert Stuart's Portrait of George Washington which was on a national tour, and hosted a very successful exhibition of Mexican retablos from the New Mexico State University, as well as exhibiting a show of Rodin bronzes which saw record breaking attendances of over 10,000 people.[145] No archival records from the period of Lorenz's directorship are stored at the University of Nevada. However, media reports on the appointment of Lorenz mention that the LVAM would be focusing on fund-raising so that it would be able to show artists with a local or international profile and, while news reports mention the high degree of support, particularly financial, from the Las Vegas art community, specific community goals are not mentioned.[146] In 2003 she was replaced by Karen Barrett. During Barrett's tenure as director, Mann returned as curator-at-large and curated and wrote catalogue essays for a number of exhibitions by artists with more established reputations than those shown under his Art After Post Modernism banner, such as abstract muralist Marlene Tseng Yu, printmaker Phyllis Sloane and sculptor Fredrick Hart.

However, the LVAM continued to struggle and in 2005 its board appointed a new director, Libby Lumpkin, who was the founding curator of the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art. It was reported that Mann's tenure as curator-at-large had come to an end because of his "more traditionalist esthetic (sic) and exhibitions which took a sometimes querulous tone".[147] The change was explained as a move to "widen its (the LVAM's) focus to include more community-

[145] McGee, Kimberley, Rodin exhibition reopens lively authenticity debate, Las Vegas Sun, 31 August 2001
[146] McGee, Kimberley, Las Vegas museum, curator part ways, Las Vegas Sun, 4 October 2001
[147] Twardy, Chuck, Lumpkin at LVAM, Las Vegas Weekly, 27 October 2005

oriented art to appeal to Las Vegas' expanding population".[148] The mission statement of the museum was changed. It described the LVAM as "a community museum dedicated to enabling all individuals to enrich lives by understanding the connection between art and life".[149] It went on to say that it aimed to achieve this goal through "contemporary exhibitions, as well as educational and entertainment programs, which reflect the community interests and cultural diversity of our residents," and wanted to make art accessible through "exhibitions, education, events and community outreach".[150]

As with the mission statement released in 1998, this mission statement stated unequivocally that a community role was central to the purpose of the LVAM. The new mission statement, in line with many mission statements from other US museums and art museums worldwide, declared that the LVAM would represent the interests of its perceived community and defined that community as 'residents,' that it as being within the geographic parameters of the city. The beneficial role of the museum, here as so often, was articulated as deriving through exhibitions, education and community engagement, and was stated as a key element in the purpose of the institution. As discussed above, engagement with communities has become an expected function of almost all museums. Therefore, the use of the phrase, 'community outreach' acknowledged a socially beneficial role for the LVAM and served as a legitimizing signifier for the institution. Furthermore, the community focus was reinforced through the use of the phrase 'cultural diversity of our residents'. This can be read to mean that future exhibitions at the LVAM would no longer focus on a community of art lovers but would instead seek to represent the many different groups that constituted the inhabitants of the city. However, as pointed out by Bourdieu, and suggested by Michael Saward, calls to represent or be working for communities or publics may mask other intentions.

[148] McGee, Kimberley, Las Vegas museum, curator part ways, Las Vegas Sun, 4 October 2001
[149] Las Vegas Art Museum History and Goals, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archive, undated
[150] Ibid.

Once she was appointed as director, Lumpkin was quoted as saying that the museum also had aspirations to national recognition.[151] The tensions between goals of representing diversity in the community of Las Vegas and the desire to be part of a national curatorial dialogue that validated the institution through high-profile exhibitions for an art world public, that troubled the LVAM during Mann's tenure were to continue. These are best seen in, perhaps the most successful exhibition at the LVAM, certainly the most positively reviewed, Las Vegas Diaspora. This exhibition opened in 2007 and was curated by the art critic and writer, Dave Hickey. Mann aimed to put Las Vegas on the cultural map by providing an alternative to the art trends of the West and East Coast art cognoscenti, while at the same time asserting that he was speaking for a silent majority of art lovers. Lumpkin and Hickey's show aimed to put the art of Las Vegas squarely in the mainstream of the US art world, albeit with a Las Vegas twist. The image of the outsider nature of the city, its exceptionalism, was woven into the exhibitions curated by Mann and Hickey, although from slightly different perspectives.

Unlike the Art After Post Modernism exhibitions, Las Vegas Diaspora showed artists who, while not all from Las Vegas, had trained there and used the city as a source of inspiration. The exhibition focused entirely on students from the Art Department of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who had been taught by Hickey. From Hickey's perspective conformity to rule-based norms constrains the creation, display and appreciation of art. For him Las Vegas offers an opportunity to become unshackled from these constraints.[152] Hickey, like Mann, viewed Las Vegas, not as an exemplar to the rest of America but as an exception. Therefore, in his essay in the exhibition catalogue Hickey states that, although Las Vegas had art "however fake and bad" it did not have "a judgmental stratum of Protestant overseers devoted to keeping things nice and

[151] Twardy, Chuck, Lumpkin at LVAM, Las Vegas Weekly, 27 October 2005
[152] Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy,* Los Angeles, Art Issue Press, 1997

proper".[153] For him, this is what makes the city, and the art produced by the students at the university, so special.

Where Mann wanted Vegas to "step forward as a highly important, even dominant center for the nascent worldwide movement,"[154] Hickey's vision of Las Vegas was as a place where artists could escape from the pressures to conform that are, according to him, found elsewhere in the US. Mann was hoping that Las Vegas could become more respectable, that its art exhibitions would be "worthy of the growing international status and fame that Las Vegas now enjoys".[155] In contrast Hickey described Vegas as "better than cities with no art at all, better than urban places that offered no invitation to look at the world. Compared to Pittsburgh or Des Moines, Vegas was a dream".[156] Mann envisaged Las Vegas becoming a leader of other cities, while Hickey wanted it to retain its outsider status.

The exhibition proclaimed that it was a celebration of the city of Las Vegas. "LVAM is pleased to present the Las Vegas Diaspora exhibition as our way of celebrating the arts in Las Vegas, and to demonstrate the Museum's commitment to supporting the local art community," LVAM Board of Trustees President Jim Zeiter was quoted as saying. He continued,

> "The exhibition provides the opportunity to introduce the artists who are out in the world representing our city. These artists are some of the best and most interesting artists in the country; they deserve to be recognized here in Las Vegas for their contributions to the culture…We are providing an opportunity for the Southern Nevada community to get to meet the artists personally, and see examples of the works that have brought them recognition in major art centers".[157]

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153 Hickey, Dave, *Las Vegas Diaspora: The Emergence of Contemporary Art from the Neon Homeland*, Nevada, Las Vegas Art Museum, 2007, p.61 (afterwards Hickey)
154 Mann, James, Las Vegas Art Museum, Mission Statement, 1997, University of Nevada archives
155 Ibid.
156 Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy,* Los Angeles, Art Issue Press, 1997, p. 61
157 Artdaily.org, 30 September 2007

The Las Vegas Diaspora exhibition was intended to celebrate the accomplishments of artist who trained in Las Vegas and to provide "an opportunity for the community to enjoy a selection of the artists' works on home turf".[158] Although most of the works on view were lent by collectors and galleries that were not in Las Vegas, without a permanent collection of contemporary art in the city, even works owned by Las Vegas residents could not be viewed by a wider public. The success in the US and internationally of artists who had trained in Las Vegas was little known outside of those who were already interested in art.

One Neon Decade, Hickey's essay in the catalogue for Las Vegas Diaspora makes much of the ways that the city and the students that he taught at UNLV were different from those in mainstream America. He describes his students as having "deep reservoirs of urban impudence,"[159] as discussing gambling point-spreads at break time, hanging out with nude models who were also strippers, and having "fled to Vegas from joyless theory-driven programs".[160] The students had "come to make art in Las Vegas, and Las Vegas is a stern mistress".[161] The exhibition not only focused on artists who trained in Las Vegas but it deliberately used the city as a lens through which to interpret their works. Just as an exhibition of an artist such as Canaletto might seek to ground his works in the Venice of his time, so too did Hickey seek to ground the works shown in Las Vegas Diaspora in the Vegas of their time. However, the city of Las Vegas, in this configuration was identical to the Strip.

In terms of the exhibition, the aspect of the city that most influenced the young artists was the Strip. The exhibition did not allow for the kinds of community envisaged by Hunsberger to be an inspiration for artistic production. Hickey mocks places without the "urbanity" of Vegas as "bucolic purgatory".[162] The lives of those working in casinos or hotels or the experiences of people outside of the Strip are not discussed as influences on these works. Their art represented

[158] Hickey, p.87
[159] Hickey, p. 62
[160] Hickey, p. 64
[161] Hickey, p.64
[162] Hickey, p. 62

their responses to the Las Vegas of casinos and entertainment. They used or reused many of the accepted tropes about that part of the city and in doing so they became drawn into its ambit. It is impossible to perceive in their art, the lives of the students beyond their experiences of the Strip.

As we have seen, ideas about authenticity and reality in Las Vegas are complicated by its devotion to tourism. The casinos are authentic in the sense that they exist and have an influence on visitors. Yet, although the LVAM claimed to be for the inhabitants of the city, the emphasis on a particular tourist and leisure perspective of Las Vegas, echoed tourists' denial of realities that might disrupt their leisure experience.[163] Just as tourist sites may hide the reality of the lives of indigenous people to create spaces for visitors that shield them from unwanted and unexpected encroachments on their idealised tourist experience so that they may gain the maximum pleasure from it,[164] so too do art museums. For Hickey, "One didn't need to invent the *idea* of Vegas" because the city already had a well-defined image that included gambling, sex, neon and leisure – all the thing that Hickey proposed in the catalogue made the artists in the collection interesting. Hickey's insistence that the artists in the collection were interested in the leisure aspects of the city did not leave space to consider other aspects of the lived experience of Vegas, such as living conditions, worker rights, ownership of public space, or race or gender. As curator of the exhibition, issues outside of those that Hickey identifies, are not discussed.

Just as the city of Las Vegas attracts a high number of immigrants from across the US, so too, did Hickey's art programme. Of the 26 artists represented in the exhibition, eight were born outside of the US, hailing from the UK, Japan, Canada, Egypt and Singapore. As befits a city that is known for high rates of inward, and outward, migration, only two artists were born in Las Vegas. However, eleven of them were living and working in Las Vegas at the time of the exhibition and nine were living and working in California. The city is the framing mechanism for

163 Urry, John*, The Tourist Gaze, Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London, Sage Publications, 1990
164 Rothman, Hal, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism and the Twentieth Century American West,* Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1998

the exhibition and the ways that the artists responded to the influences of Vegas as the results in a way that the works of art that Mann selected were not.

The transient nature of many inhabitants to Las Vegas is one of the aspects of the city that commentators on the city, including Hickey, thought made the city superior to others in the US. As discussed above, the inhabitants of Vegas are often characterised as only passing through, and having no loyalty to the city, undermining attempts to establish communities. Furthermore, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the image of the city for many recent arrivals is mediated through the Las Vegas brand that is portrayed in the media. The Strip and the casinos, therefore can often be more important to recent arrivals in defining the city than their own experiences.[165] Las Vegas Diaspora engaged with the concepts of a city of recent arrivals and what this might mean for the ways in which art was produced by students in the city. However, it is not simply that the UNLV students came from varying backgrounds. Many bohemian milieu's have attracted a large number of people from a broad variety of places. For Hickey it is the vibrancy of their popular cultural influences that they brought with them that was important.

> "We got the offspring of Singapore businessmen, Brooklyn psychoanalysts, Alabama evangelists, New York jazz musicians, Canadian professors, Egyptian high rollers, British disc jockeys, Polish working guys and Vegas jazz mavens. We got graffiti taggers from East LA, lowriders from Ocean Beach, and van painters from the San Fernando Valley. We got slackers from Dallas, skateboarders from North Las Vegas and cops' kids from Simi Valley".[166]

Hickey believed that Las Vegas was truly democratic and more representative of people's preferences than could be possible in art museums or other allegedly authoritarian institutions.[167]

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[165] Gottdiener, M., Collins, Claudia, C., Dickens, David, R., *Las Vegas: The Social Production of An All-American City,* Massachusetts & Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999, p. 213
[166] Hickey, p. 64
[167] Crosby, Gregory, High Thoughts in Low Places: Adventures in Raw Democracy with Las Vegas Art Critic Dave Hickey." Scope 25 Jun – 14 July 1998

The market is the true determinant of popularity for Hickey because it is able to provide people with what they want without the mediation of experts or institutions that think they know what is good for people. According to Hickey everyone can appreciate art and the intervention of academically trained professionals only serves to deter people from engaging. Thus, the purpose of the popularisation of arts institutions would be to demystify the experiences of engaging with art and bring it to more people. This process of popularisation at art museums, for Hickey, would ensure that they were communicating to everyday people rather than an elite.[168] However,

The very Post Modernism that Mann decried in his manifesto is the exaltation of the vernacular that Hickey praises. As well as drawing attention to the varied origins of the students on Hickey's course, in the catalogue essay he deliberately emphasises a broad range of influences including sports, music and alternative 'low culture' artistic expression. His praise for influences outside of art history, or even the art world, his love of unexpected sources and diverse inspiration are made plain. Hickey emphasised the "eccentricities" such gambling, sexuality and the perceived freedom that he believed the Strip embodied. East L.A. tags, pornography, the Spice Girls, flocked wallpaper, competitive sports and perhaps not surprisingly Andy Warhol are referenced as populist influences.

The use of bright, exuberant, sometimes day-glo colours in works by Philip Argent (Untitled 2006-2007), Tim Bavington (Step (In) Out), Thomas Burke (The Hots), Jane Callister (Cosmic Landslide), Jack Hallberg (2103), Shawn Hummel (iateyouwithmyford) and Angela Kallus (Bad Spot (detail)) is explicitly linked by Hickey to one aspect of Las Vegas, neon. Neon is part of the popular perception of Las Vegas, although by the late 1990s most of the neon signs of the city had been replaced. Neon signs are an aspect of the city expected by tourists and repeated in numerous articles and headlines.[169] Hickey underscores the point by titling his catalogue essay,

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168 Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, Los Angeles, Art Issues Press, 1997

169 For example, O'Brian, Matthew, *Beneath the Neon: Life and Death in the Tunnels of Las Vegas*; Rothman, Hal, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twentieth Century;* and Natal, Judy, *Neon Boneyard: Las Vegas A-Z*

One Neon Decade. "You see Vegas in color," Hickey was quoted as saying, "if you're in the middle of a wheat field in Iowa, can you paint that Tim Bavington painting? I don't think so".[170]

He ties their work in with the lounge music revival of the late 1990s and early 2000s, referencing Martin Denny's version of *Quiet Village* as a key track for the students, as well as *The Girl From Ipanema* and the soundtrack to *Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. He describes their work as being in antagonism to ideas of political correctness that were then current in American academia. Hickey is conflating his ideals of the transient nature of Las Vegas's population, a postmodern love of mixing ideas and influences from different sources and his belief that vernacular culture is superior to the academy because it is more widely accepted.

Hickey does not provide a critique of the works in the exhibition, or even attempts to provide a conceptual link between the paintings. The theme of the exhibition is art produced by students in Las Vegas and inspired by their time in the city. Hickey explains the exhibition thus:

> "I have decided to gather together the work of these artists at ground zero … in the place whose generous spirit and powerful eccentricity made the work possible: the city of Las Vegas."

It was the impact of the city on the students – Hickey is adamant that he was not the primary inspiration to his students – that the exhibition explores.

> "It (Las Vegas) was home to a dynamic mercantile culture that loved the new, embraced change, and took risks as a matter of course. In an atmosphere like this, the arts can flourish, even in the sunshine of absolute neglect."

The adoption of pop cultural images and 'party' titles also feeds into the image of the city as a place of unrestricted leisure – Thomas Burke (The Hots), Jane Callister (Cosmic Landslide), Curtis Fairman (Sadiddy), Gajin Fujita (Burn); Sush Machida Gaikotsu (Taketori Okina Tiger and

[170] Peterson, Kirsten, Art World No Longer Could Ignore Las Vegas, Las Vegas Sun, 28 September 2007

To the Capital of the Moon), James Gobel (Ridicule is Nothing to be Ashamed Of) James Hough (Beheaded Lover) Carrie Jenkins (Night Crawler)Victoria Reynolds (Down the Primrose Path). Meanwhile the Mise En Scene section of the catalogue included images of the artists eating, drinking and generally having fun. It is not unusual to see photographs in catalogues of artists enjoying themselves, however, when linked with Hickey's attempts to draw a picture of a hedonistic rule-breaking experience that could only happen in Las Vegas, the photographs further linked the artists to a particular image of the city in which they studied.

The Las Vegas Diaspora exhibition was a statement about the vibrancy and value of the art scene in Las Vegas. Hickey, and Lumpkin, presented the UNLV students' work in such a way as to suggest that they were producing work of national significance. Although the focus was different from Art after Post Modernism as it included artists who had trained in the city rather than artists from other parts of the country, the intent was the same, which was to put Las Vegas on the national cultural map. The dialogue, therefore, was between those who were interested in art in the city and those who were interested in art nationally. Just as with Mann's exhibitions, Las Vegas Diaspora, sought to represent the city to a wider audience. It also deliberately utilised the commonly recognised tropes of Las Vegas. The city presented by Las Vegas Diaspora was the Las Vegas that tourists might expect to encounter, encompassing drinking, sex, music and neon. The claim to represent the city, therefore, could also be read as a claim to represent the city-as-tourist-destination. Thus, this representative claim supported the gaming industry, already recognised by the city as the pre-eminent influence on Vegas's fortunes and future. The art museum's attempt to represent the city-as-tourist-destination, acknowledged an assumption that local communities would not be sufficient to support an art museum and that visitors from outside the city were necessary. The view that the city lacked strong communities was thus supported by the curatorial choices of the LVAM under Lumpkin, while at the same time feeding into the already existing image of the city as a location that was predominantly about tourism.

6. Conclusion

In February 2009 the chronic financial problems that had dogged the LVAM throughout its existence came to a head, and lacking sufficient funding to cover operating costs, it was forced to close. Funding at the LVAM was always parlous as it relied to an extreme degree on ticket sales. The hiring of more staff, including Libby Lumpkin, resulted in the payroll ballooning from $232,602 in 2006 to $593,944 in 2007, while in the same period revenue remained stagnant at $1.6 million.[171] Attempts to increase attendance, and hence ticket sales, were unsuccessful. At the time of its closure the LVAM's membership scheme had only attracted just over 1,000 members and although a fledgling young collectors scheme had been launched at the Guggenheim, one was not launched at the LVAM.[172] As with the BGFA and the Guggenheims the causes for the closure of the LVAM were financial. With substantially less funds and with no access to works by famous artists, housed in a smaller space in a library that lacked the element of surprise that comes with the meeting of museum and casino, the LVAM was always something of a 'poor cousin' to the casino art museums. National journalists were less interested in it as an institution and its exhibitions were rarely reviewed outside of Nevada. Mann's idiosyncratic invention of Art After Post Modernism certainly did little to recommend a small museum in a city renowned for pleasures of the flesh to a national audience.

The space that it occupied in the Sahara West Library was converted to library use. Its collection, never very extensive and mainly of works by local artists, was taken to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where it remains in the event that the LVAM is resurrected and since its closure there have been frequent press reports that it might reopen in a number of different locations. However, as at the time of writing, the Las Vegas Art Museum remains merely a name. The absence of significant government support in the US, and particularly in Nevada, for arts

[171] Peterson, Kirsten, In the Valley, a tepid market for arts, Las Vegas Sun, 12 March 2009
[172] Fox, William, L., *In the Desert of Desire*, Reno & Las Vegas ,University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 143

institutions makes them very susceptible to financial insecurity unless they are supported by wealthy donors.

Perspectives of the city that see it as embodied by the casinos also foster the belief that the city had no community. Through declarations of public service that would benefit the community the LVAM indicated that it would be offering an alternative to the narrative of the city that only focused on the casinos. Furthermore, the LVAM showed that it was an authentic art museum through its community declarations as it was stating that it would act in ways similar to other art museums. Statements that it would "promote and encourage art in the community,"[173] maintain the "tradition of community service,"[174] and "reflect the community interests and cultural diversity of our residents,"[175] served to reinforce the authentic nature of the art museum. This isomorphic behavior, together with the history of the creation of the Sahara West Library, positioned the LVAM as providing something for the inhabitants of the city that could not be found in the Vegas casinos, even after the establishment of the BGFA and the Guggenheims. In a similar way to the architecture of the Guggenheim, the authenticity of the LVAM could be seen as proven through its opposition to the inauthenticity of the Strip. In a museum context this was an emphasis on 'community' rather than tourists.

The location of the BGFA and the Guggenheims in casinos was part of the character of each institution. Their imagined publics were tourists – albeit tourists who were interested in art. Neither institution attempted to fulfil a social function beyond introducing art to people who may not previously have encountered it. If authenticity is an adherence to truth, then the casino art museums were authentic in that they imagined their audiences as tourists, and communicated this. However, the LVAM's relationship to ideas of audiences was different, more complex and less comfortable. Defining communities through public address, whether national or local, has

[173] Las Vegas Art League, Art in the Community, 1952-53, Report #3, undated, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[174] Press Release, 14 February 1997, University of Nevada, Las Vegas archives
[175] Ibid.

been a function of art museums since at least the establishment of the Louvre. Therefore, the LVAM was acting in ways that supported its authenticity through institutional mimesis. As with all museums, the exhibitions at the LVAM sought to connect to idealised publics. The composition of these publics included people who were not inhabitants of the city but were interested in art and who therefore might visit Vegas. To achieve these gaols the curatorial choices made at the art museum favoured conceptions of the city that focused on the casinos and the Strip.

However, the legitimization that the LVAM sought to accrue through its declarations of community engagement, could only come through a dialogue with already interested and informed publics. As explored by Pierre Bourdieu, the demonstration of 'taste,' in this case through an interest in an art museum, is not neutral but rather is a form of social orientation.[176] 'Taste' according to Bourdieu, is unequally distributed and relates to relations to knowledge and cultural capital.[177] Hence, the nature of the LVAM's representative claim meant that it addressed a specific audience with existing knowledge and understandings, through its claim to represent the entirety of a geographically defined group. In effect the community engagement statements were a call to action rather than the constitution of a public. The public to which these statements were intended was not defined by the parameters of the city but was instead a community of interest that went beyond the city and was intended to be national.

In conjunction with public statements about its public service, the choices of objects that were displayed, was intended to signify the LVAM's legitimacy and authenticity through conforming to ideals of the art museum. In particular, James Mann and Dave Hickey sought to use their exhibitions to (re)define Las Vegas, and present the city in a positive manner. Although both curators had differing views on Vegas, fundamentally they wished to bring it to the attention of a

[176] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 6
[177] Ibid.

national art loving public so that they might visit the city. Art After Post Modernism and Las Vegas Diaspora can both be understood in this context. From this perspective, the contents of the exhibition were not specifically constituted with local tastes in mind but rather to showcase the location to those that were prepared to travel to experience it. The LVAM's attempts to stand on a national stage, inevitably made it less of a 'local' museum and made it more similar in its imagined publics to the casino museums.

Through a widening out of the LVAM's imagined publics from a geographical community centred on Las Vegas, to a national community of art lovers, the legitimacy it claimed also changed. The claim altered from one that supported communities to one that represented communities – from activity to advocacy. The museum's relationship to ideas of community altered from 'service' to 'reflect'. Although the LVAM wished to encourage tourists, it avoided accusation of popularisation because it's audiences were existing art lovers. Unlike the BGFA and the Guggenheim there was no rhetoric around "the masses,"[178] "the people"[179] or "the widest possible audience".[180] Rather it wished to position the city as a new centre for the art world and celebrate the vibrancy of the art scene in the city. Although its aspirations were extremely ambitious, they were neither populist or delegitimising. Nor were they, however, easy to fold into local community based goals that the museum itself advocated.

As we have seen in Las Vegas, the word community can be a slippery term when used by art museums. It suggests some form of cooperation and collaboration between groups but also that the groups can be represented by the institution. The possibility of multiple meanings of the word indicated at the LVAM that it was the museum that was, through its public address, able to constitute communities, either defined geographically or through commonality of interests. The curatorial decisions at the LVAM were part of a process of conferring distinction on the

[178] Wynning Streak, The Irish Times, 13 February 1999
[179] The Economist, Hangings in the Wild West: Contemporary Art in America, 4 August 2001
[180] Masterpieces and Master Collectors: Impressionist and Modern Paintings from The Hermitage and Guggenheim Museums, September 16 2001 – March 17 2002 Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2001, p.11

institution, through asserting its legitimising relationship to its imagined publics. Therefore, at the LVAM these authenticating signifiers could exist solely as a conceptual form of public address. The use of the term community was intended to have a particular resonance beyond the local community that was referenced and act as a legitimising signifier for national communities of interest. The authenticity of the LVAM was shown through its representational claims but the audience for these claims were not the groups that were claimed to be represented. At the BGFA symbolic cultural capital was incorporated into a tourist experience, while at the Guggenheims visitors were encouraged to undertake performative actions that were separate from those of the casino. At the LVAM, claims for local community representation were used to address a wider community through legitimising museum isomorphism.

Conclusion: Viva Las Vegas

This study has shown how three museums of art in Las Vegas, the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, the Guggenheim Hermitage/Guggenheim Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Art Museum utilised signifiers of museum legitimacy through ideals of isomorphic authenticity. The signifiers of their 'museum-ness' were in turn used for the populist goal of attracting visitors in a commercialised tourist setting, which was intended to accrue economic capital. Their authenticity was communicated through the use of symbolic cultural capital signifiers relating to art history, architecture and audiences. Each case study has focused on the primary channel of communication at each institution – critical interpretation at the BGFA, architecture at the Guggenheim and public address at the LVAM - to show how each is crucial to the legitimisation/popularisation nexus. Historical textual analysis of these channels of communication showed the ways that each institution used pre-existing and widely understood mainstream ideals of art museums to define themselves. However, the location of these institutions meant that their relationships to questions of legitimacy and populism defied the easy dichotomy that is frequently applied in other locations. The brief histories of these museums of art problematises homogenised ideas of legitimate art museum signifiers and the uses to which these signifiers might be used.

The cases studies have shown that these institutions utilised existing notions of the art museum (museum-ness) that were widely accepted and conventional within museum discourse and practice, to conceptualise themselves. These referential conceptualisations in the particular environment of Las Vegas shaped the kinds of experiences they offered and understandings of who those experiences were for. By using expected museum signifiers to prove their authenticity and become tourist attractions the Las Vegas art museums disrupted the legitimization/popularisation dichotomy. Interpretative signifiers of authenticity at the BGFA were folded into populist ideas of tourist experiences to create an experiential tourist attraction,

showing that the concepts need not be opposites but might be partners. Architectural signifiers at the Guggenheims in the Venetian were used to define an authentic environment at odds with the supposed inauthenticity at the Venetian, showing that concepts of what constitutes authenticity at art museums are not sympathetic in every location. Finally, messages of community engagement were used as legitimising tools at the LVAM showing that authenticating signifiers can exist solely as a conceptual form of public address intended for communities beyond those referenced. The Las Vegas art museums aimed to attract visitors through using isomorphic authenticity derived from museum mimesis.

The location of the three Vegas art museums has enabled this study to ask questions about the image and behaviours of these art museums which, in other locations, might seem 'natural'. It was not that these institutions were acting in ways that were unusual in a museum context, but that in a Las Vegas context it might seem strange that they were acting in ways that were usual in a museum context. In particular, Las Vegas's reputation as a location for reproductions and imitations, and its wholesale adherence to tourism and commodification, foregrounded the art museums' relationship to authenticity. In a city that celebrates the inauthentic, the Las Vegas art museums set out to prove their legitimacy as genuine art museums and not as reproductions. Rather than adopting an approach from the city's themed casinos and becoming facsimile museums, they presented themselves as genuine museums of art. As the case studies have shown, the authenticity of the museums was shown through the display of genuine works of art but also, crucially, through adopting recognisable art museum behaviours and signifiers. For instance, the LVAM's declaration to be working for the community of Las Vegas would have gone unremarked in another city, however in Vegas which many claim has no community, it was an actively legitimising claim that was intended to prove the institution's authenticity.

The thesis has not attempted to determine whether the three art museums were in some way authentic or not. Instead it is the uses to which the concepts of authenticity in a museum setting

have been put that has been the focus. The binary concept of legitimate or populist symbolism and activities at art museums meant that the Las Vegas art museums had to work harder than many other museums to prove their legitimacy. In contrast, the institutional distinction of a museum such as the Museum of Fine Arts Boston derives, in part, from the ways in which it 'naturally' acts and behaves so as to legitimise itself. The study of the Las Vegas museums has, therefore, asked questions about the legitimising aspects of art museums that are rarely asked in other locations but which were crucial in this context. The catalogue for the BGFA, for instance, returns to the issue of an art museum in a casino a number of times, and although it finds no better justification than 'why not', there was a recognition that there was a tension between understandings of art museums and understandings of casinos. The usually unquestioned isomorphic legitimising signifiers used at art museums needed to be identified and pointed out in the city because of its populist image.

Despite local and national media coverage, the experience of visiting the art museums was the main conduit through which they addressed their publics and which were mediated through interpretative interventions in encounters with works of art, the spatial demands imposed by the buildings in which the works resided and the curatorial choices of which works of art were displayed. Each case study has focused on a single form of address that might be considered a crucial part of an 'authentic' art museum – interpretation, architecture and exhibitions - so that each could be interrogated in more detail. In doing so it has been possible to discern different relationships to supposedly authenticating symbolic cultural capital,. However, no art museum relies solely on one form of communication. All museums exist in buildings, attempt to interpret objects for visitors, and imagine the communities that they wish to address. The focus of each case study should not indicate that other signifiers were not in play.

Perhaps the most interesting approach in the city to the use of cultural capital was at the BGFA. It would have been fascinating to have seen how the use of disinterested engagements as part of

the heritage tourist gaze was either maintained or developed if Wynn's collection had remained there longer. The absorption of an art gallery into the casino's luxury offering could have been an example of the de-legitimisation of an art museum through an overt play for populism. However, the interpretative insistence on disinterested aesthetic engagements with the collection - of feeling and not thinking - in the context of Las Vegas, combined legitimising aesthetic experiential ideals with concepts of tourism in the experience economy. Instead of offering both intellectual and visceral experiences in tandem, the BGFA provided a hybrid in which the intellectual and the visceral supported each other. This approach harnessed authentic art museum ideals of disinterested encounters, not as something in opposition to tourism, but as an integral part of the offering. The BGFA was not like a casino but it was able to be successfully folded into the leisure offerings of a casino.

The Guggenheim in the Venetian, despite being a partnership between a casino and an art museum, did not integrate into the casino's leisure offerings as successfully as the BGFA. The cultural capital signifier that acted as the primary channel of the art museum's legitimacy was its architecture. The relationship between the art museum and the casino reflected a dichotomous concept of legitimacy, where expected forms and functions underpinned isomorphic authenticity, as opposed to popularisation where immediate and possibly shallow experiences at the casino were utilised to reach the widest possible audience. In the Venetian, the Guggenheim deliberately aimed to offer an alternative to the experiences at the casino. Although the catalogue of the BGFA stated that it was offering superior experiences to those that were offered elsewhere in the casino, the relationship between the casino and the art museum was acknowledged. The Guggenheims, however, virtually ignored their host and firmly asserted their authenticity through opposition to the Venetian, both visually and conceptually. Yet, in Las Vegas, the Venetian represented an approach to architecture that focused on an aesthetic populism that is more authentic to the prevalent mode of the city's casino architecture.

Furthermore, the post-modern borrowings and references by the Guggenheim's architecture may have associated the museum with other art museums, but this process relied on reproductions and appropriations in ways that were similar to the architecture of the Venetian. In Las Vegas both the casino and the art museum could plausibly be described as being authentic and as well-being copies.

The Las Vegas Museum of Art's history until it moved to the Sahara West Library in 1995 was that of a small artists' league that aimed to introduce more people to fine art through exhibitions and art lessons. Initially in a location purchased by the municipality to be used for the city's inhabitants, the move to the library further strengthened its links to ideals of community service. Its claims to be fulfilling a community function emphasised its institutional isomorphism with other museums of art, where such claims are commonplace. The community claims connected the institution firmly to the city, thereby making it possible to assert that it was offering art that had a distinctly Las Vegan flavour and which could not be found elsewhere. It was, therefore, the LVAM's address to its imagined publics that was, in this instance, a vital part of its attempt to accrue cultural capital. In turn the authenticity that was associated with a museum that claimed to speak for its local community was used to address a wider community of interest across the US and attract tourists to visit the LVAM. In effect its representational claims were intended as a call to action rather than the constitution of a local public.

This is the first in-depth study of these art museum. For the first time it brings together material from a wide range of sources in Las Vegas that have not previously been the focus of academic studies, such as archival material, catalogues, photography, press releases, public statements and media reports. There are few remaining traces for these three art museums and, given the nature of Las Vegas, little interest in preservation or recreation. The spaces in which the LVAM and the Guggenheim were housed have been repurposed, Wynn's collection at the BGFA has been dispersed and focus in the city has moved on from fine art and towards sporting events and

nightclubs. Although they lived and died only decades ago, the memory of these art museums is already fading. This study will it is hoped start a process by which these fascinating art museums do not become little more than footnotes in Las Vegas history, as has been the fate for so many of the casinos that have been torn down and replaced.

Yet, as well as telling a story that is in danger of slipping between the cracks, these studies of small art museums serve to round out understandings of the art museum as an institution. Academic and professional understandings of art museums have frequently presented them as institutions that have more features in common than differences. Meanwhile legitimacy is expressed through reference to art museums that are presented as embodying the ideals of the institution as a whole. Institutional isomorphism ensures that art museums remain similar to each other. While the Las Vegas art museums were not in any way trailblazers in the museum world, their relationships to ideas of what art museums could and should do tells us about not only the ways that larger institutions influence their smaller relatives, but also the ways that the smaller institutions respond to the idealisations of the art museum. Thinking about these institutions as if they were smaller versions of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Frick smooths out the nuances. In Las Vegas the museums of art showed that adhering to preconceived notions of cultural capital could at the same time be used as part of strategies to accrue financial capital. It was possible for these institutions to use signifiers of cultural capital as tools for popularisation, albeit unsuccessfully, in ways that the institutions that they claimed to emulate (or supersede) do not acknowledge.

It is to be hoped that more data will become available to fill in the gaps about the history of these Las Vegas art museums, specifically relating to the decision-making processes at each institution, in-depth financial analysis, or even more first-hand reports by visitors of their experiences. However, the available documentation has allowed for explorations of the ways that these institutions attempted to mediate experiences and control the ways that they were

perceived. Unfortunately, during their brief lives, none of these museums undertook visitor analyses. Therefore, the success, or otherwise, of their communications cannot be assessed, no more so that for visitor to the Louvre or the Metropolitan when they opened. It is also, at this remove, not possible to know the demographics of visitors. A study of museum intentions that does not include whether these were successful or not may seem to be only telling half the story. Yet much history is partial and incomplete and we do not therefore dismiss it as useless or unhelpful.

In Las Vegas, isomorphism manifested itself at the art museums through their claims to be like (or better than) other well-known art institutions. This process enabled ideals of authenticity to be made through claims to legitimacy and through their actions. There were indeed strong similarities between the BGFA and the Frick, for instance. In the instance of the Las Vegas art museums, legitimising aspects of the idealised art museum, such as disinterested aesthetic engagements, transcendent physical experiences, and socially purposeful public address, were used to 'prove' the authenticity of the institutions to their intended publics. The Las Vegas art museums were not copies of more established art museums but rather used them as inspirations, so that the 'theme' for all three art museums was 'art museum'. The art museums in this thesis reacted to *the* idealised art museum in ways that would be expected of new art museums by adopting and following codes derived from other longer-lasting museums of art.

However, the motives for the establishment of the Frick and the goals that it has subsequently pursued do not exactly align with the BGFA, regardless of the hyperbole in the catalogue. The Las Vegas art museums did not only adopt recognisable codes to prove their 'museum-ness'. They utilised these codes to speak to their imagined audiences, which in these case studies were primarily tourists. Even the LVAM, the art museum with the best claim to be addressing a community (one that was largely defined as the inhabitants of the city), was simultaneously addressing an imagined national public with the aim of attracting tourists to the city. The cultural

capital signifiers used by all three Vegas institutions brought legitimacy which were in turn used for tourism. At the BGFA this was blatant, while the Guggenheim Las Vegas attempted to deflect its involvement with a tourist site, and the LVAM obfuscated the relationship through the vagueness of its public address.

In 2002 French theorist Boris Begout commented that "… the culture of consumerism and recreation that has transfigured Las Vegas for nearly thirty years daily gains more ground in our everyday relation to the city".[181] Sixteen years later, the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency may have been the ultimate conclusion of Begout's prediction, as ideas about society, politics and economics that are entrenched in Las Vegas have become part of mainstream American discourse. Indeed, since the opening of the LVAM in 1950, and even since the opening of the BGFA in 1998, Las Vegas has become increasingly less of a rebel as innovations in the city are adopted elsewhere. Both Steve Wynn and Sheldon Adelson, as well as other casino moguls, donated many millions of dollars to the Trump campaign[182] and both were nominated to Trump's inauguration committee.[183] The outsider image of the city, perhaps never as outside of the mainstream of US society as has been portrayed, was further weakened once casino moguls were in the corridors of power in Washington D.C. The tensions at art museums between their socially conscious and pedagogic aspirations and the capitalism of which they are a part, did not find resolution in Las Vegas. However, although the 'experimental' challenge to museum legitimacy in Vegas may not have been successful, the commodification and libertarianism of the city has proved resilient and attractive across the US, as have the ways in which it has used ideas of authenticity.

Las Vegas's relationship to authenticity is one of its defining features. Themed casinos are not built with the expectation that guests will think that they are really in New York or ancient

[181] Begout, Bruce, *Zeropolis: The Experience of Las Vegas,* London, Reaktion Books, 2002, p. 12

[182] Stone, Peter, Sheldon Adelson backs Trump visit to Israel after $100m pledge, The Guardian, 20 May 2016

[183] Schouten, Fredreka, Sheldon Adelson, Steve Wynn Join Donald Trump's Inauguration Team, USA Today, 15 November 2016

Rome. However, although the objects/architecture/attractions may not be genuine the experience of engaging with them, for many tourists, has authenticity.[184] The veracity of an experience has become the litmus test for the authenticity of an attraction. Even if the volcano outside of the Mirage resort is not a 'real' volcano, the experience of seeing it might be. The city has been at the forefront of changes to the idea of what constitutes the authentic and the increasing assertion in the US that reality might be dependent on individuals' perceptions rather than on definable truth.[185] These changes can be seen in Donald Trump's repeated accusation that facts he did not like were 'fake'. Where casinos (or politicians) "freely celebrate their fraudulence,"[186] it is the recognition of signifiers of legitimacy that becomes essential to communicate authenticity. Therefore, while the curation of objects was a vital element in the communication of the authenticity of the Vegas museums of art, so too was the curation of experiences. It is the perceived authenticity of the experience of aesthetic engagement in tourism that makes art institutions' relationships to symbolic cultural capital more vital.

The city continues to promote its reputation as the go-to city for popular entertainments and the possibly unsavoury but alluring attractions of sex and gambling. However, it is by no means without museums. There is the Discovery Children's Museum dedicated to enhancing learning for children, particularly in the sciences, through hands-on experiences, play and exploration. The museum has very strong ties to schools in the Las Vegas area and works closely with them to support their curriculums. Founded in 1984, the museum was previously the Lied Discovery Children's Museum and, as part of Charles Hunsberger's library construction programme, was housed in the Las Vegas Clark County Library until 2013 when it moved to a new building in Symphony Park. The Las Vegas Natural History Museum was founded in 1991 with help from the Las Vegas City Council which leases the building to the museum for $1 a year. It shows its

[184] Fuat, Firat The Meanings and Message of Las Vegas: The Present of our Future, Management, 2001/03 (Vol. 4)
[185] Soligo, Martha, Abarbanel, Brett, Theme and Authenticity: Experiencing heritage at the Venetian, International Hospitality Review, Volume 34, Issue 2, 2020
[186] Rugoff, Ralph, *Circus Americanus,* London, Verso, 1995, p. 3

exhibits in the form of dioramas and also has the King Tut exhibition, a recreation of the original tomb in Egypt, donated from the Luxor Casino in 2008. Both these museums have a strong community focus and support.

On 14 February 2012, the most recent museum in the city, the National Museum of Organised Crime and Law Enforcement, also known as the Mob Museum, opened. To mark the opening, seven couples were married in the museum by Las Vegas mayor Oscar Goodman, there was a performance by the cast of Jersey Boys and a display of vintage police cars.[187] The event was widely covered in the Las Vegas and US press and the museum has become a successful destination, with 1.5 million visits in its first five years.[188] Costing $42 million, the museum was largely funded by the city which contributed $33 million. In a stunt that was pure Las Vegas, in 2014 the first tranche of money repaying the city was paid in cash bundled into suitcases.[189] The idea for a museum in Las Vegas about organised crime came essentially from Goodman, a defence attorney with a long list of organised crime clients before he become the city's mayor. Goodman is now on the board of the museum.

The interpretation of the objects at the Mob Museum is, for the most part, not sensationalist and attempts to avoid valorising organised crime. Although there is no catalogue for the collection, interpretation material is available online.[190] The museum presents an historical narrative of organised crime in the US that is brought up to the present day. Unlike an art museum, the objects are used in the service of the narrative and there is no suggestion that they be experienced in an aesthetic or disinterested manner. There are original objects relating to organised crime such as the St Valentine's Day Massacre wall, an original script from the movie of the Godfather and pair of Bugsy Siegal's sunglasses, as well as reproductions. The museum

[187] Mob Museum Opens in Las Vegas, The New York Times, 13 February 2012
[188] Prince, Todd, Mob Museum in downtown Las Vegas plans $6.5 million upgrade, Las Vegas Review Journal, 22 March 2017
[189] Las Vegas Sun, Mob Museum makes huge payment in cash, Mafia style, 17 April 2014
[190] https://themobmuseum.org/ - accessed 23/01/21

includes experiential events such as a scavenger hunt, a crime lab experience, and a firearm training simulator which, despite its name encourages visitors to de-escalate dangerous situations. The use of the original and reproduction objects, interactive experiences and theming throughout (there is a Speakeasy that requires a password to enter and a working still), are common features in museums of history. The focus is very much on learning, albeit through entertainment.

In a city that does not preserve its architectural past, despite much writing about it, the Mob Museum's location in one of the few surviving buildings from the 1930s therefore, immediately communicates that it is an institution concerned with the past. That the building itself has links to the history of organised crime in the city helps to give an authentic impression – real mobsters were once inside the building! From 1950 to 1952 the building was the site of a series of hearings, called the Kefauver Hearings, that investigated the mob and, for many Americans, brought the extent of organised crime's activities to light. Although the building has been refurbished to change it from a former post office and courthouse to a museum, the exterior and much of the interior have been preserved. The courtroom in which the hearings were held has been restored and is used as a movie theatre to tell the story of the hearings. The architecture of the Mob Museum is not individualistic in the sense that the character of the architect cannot be discerned. However, in the context of the city it is a unique building that is immediately memorable because it is so different to the others around it.

The mission statement for the Mob Museum does not mention community, although it does say that it will be working for "diverse audiences".[191] However, in recent years the museum has developed a wide-ranging series of free programmes that aim to reach out to schools, people with access issues and groups that do not usually visit museums. The museum has been working with the local police department on a series of discussions on the use of excessive police force

[191] https://themobmuseum.org/ - accessed 23/01/21

which has brought together members of law enforcement and families of people shot by the police. According to Geoff Schumacher, senior director of content at the museum, "It was a really interesting conversation to try to bridge the gap between the police point of view and the point of view of the community".[192] The museum has hosted discussions on how to avoid a car accident, sexual assault prevention, human trafficking and the rehabilitation of ex-offenders.[193]

It is not possible to say if the Mob Museum's success will continue, however, it has had a very successful start in life. Like the Vegas art museums it has used recognisable art museum signifiers to show that it is a genuine museum. Its display of original objects, rather than 'authentic reproductions' allows visitors to understand that the veracity of the story that it tells is potentially derived from the veracity of the objects. Its location in an old building, in a city with few old buildings, further adds distinction by physically connecting the story of organised crime with the location of the narrative. Finally, the museum is engaging with the inhabitants of the city and finding ways to connect the story of organised crime with the lived experiences of Las Vegans. Just as with the art museums, through considering objects, architecture and audiences, the Mob Museum's isomorphism can be discerned. The legitimising signifiers that the museum has in play support the institution and confer authenticity. Just as at the three art museums, the Mob Museum is showing that it is a genuine museum and therefore the experiences that it offers have the potential to be considered authentic as well.

However, the types of objects on display in art museums differ from those found in other museums, and as pointed out by Bourdieu, art objects confer status in a way that historical objects do not.[194] Bourdieu points to the hierarchical nature of distinction and, in particular, the position of the appreciation of art as a signifier for high class status. The ability to appreciate a work of art, however it is interpreted or displayed, and whether it is by Bob Guccione or Joan

[192] Willson, Miranda, Tourism driver or community hub? Mob museum is both, The Las Vegas Sun, 13 December 2019
[193] Ibid.
[194] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London, Routledge, 2010

Miro, is a sign of societal division and comes from relations to field and habitus, producing cultural capital.[195] However, this process is not confined to 'fine art' and it is possible appreciate that it is underway at the Mob Museum. The cultural capital signifiers that are accrued by the Mob Museum may be substantially the same as those found in a museum of art, but at the same time confer less distinction. In Las Vegas a class-based perspective suggests that the Mob Museum might be more successful because its appeal is to a less high-class section of society and it is these sections of society that are more prevalent in the city.

Nevertheless, although the success of the Mob Museum may support the analysis above, and the Mob Museum and the three Las Vegas art museums conformed to recognisable museum signifiers and used these to show that they were authentic art museums in an inauthentic environment, the Mob Museum has better adapted these signifiers to its location. Rather than differentiate itself from the city, the casinos, or entertainment, it has embraced all of these and, in some ways, come to represent them through its activities. Although all of these museums in Vegas attempted to adapt ideals of 'museum-ness' to the city, only the Mob Museum has been successful. It is easier for a history museum than a museum of art to become part of an entertainment offering as populist and entertainment focused approaches to display are more common and more widely accepted at history museums. Debates around popularisation and legitimisation at art museums assert that encounters with works of art are (or should be) different to encounters with other historic objects because of the aesthetic nature of art. Nevertheless, the ways in which the Mob Museum is using a trope commonly associated with Vegas, and at the same time actively relating issues around law enforcement to a local context, indicate that the museum's adaptive approaches are simply more nuanced than those of the art museums.

The ability of the Mob Museum to adapt in ways that the art museums could not is related to the differences pointed out by Bourdieu between museums of art and museums of history as well as

[195] Bourdieu, Pierrer, Manet: A Symbolic Revolution, London, Polity Press, 2017

the Las Vegas art museums' strong conformity to pre-existing ideals of an 'ur-museum'. All three institutions conformed to ideals of art museums, and although they selected or emphasised elements that were favourable to them, they remained easily recognisable as museums of art. The authenticating isomorphism of the three art museums derived from the establishment (or attempted establishment) of linkages to understandings of how all art museums should behave. However, ideals of what constitutes a 'genuine' art museum that relate to the historic moment, or moments, in the development of the art museum as an institution, proved to be difficult to adapt to Las Vegas concepts of publics, leisure and commodification. The relative success of the Mob Museum may be due to a more refined response to the needs to the city. More research needs to be undertaken at the Mob Museum to fully tease out the ways in which its stories might relate to the Las Vegas art museums.

In Las Vegas, the very signifiers that supported art museum distinction at the same time stuntted the institutions' ability to change. The art museums found it difficult to break away from the grip of the idealised art museum and respond to local influences. In the period since the closure of the LVAM there has been a substantial increase in collaborations to develop new museums such as the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, the Guggenheim in the United Arab Emirates, the Centre Pompidou in Shanghai and the V&A in Shenzhen, the expansion of art museum 'satellites' such as the V&A in Dundee or the Louvre in Lens, plus a plethora of collaborative projects between large art museums and smaller ones, both national and international. If 20 years ago during the lives of the Vegas art museums, the important issues revolved around questions of 'selling out,' contemporary questions for new art museums revolve around attribution of the definitions of the institution and the authenticity of the experiences they offer. When art museums are founded in locations that, like Las Vegas, lack grass roots contexts, references to concepts of an 'ur-museum' offer ways to authenticate institutions and the experiences that they offer. However, while this strategy provides greater authenticity through mimetic references it also runs the risk

of narrowing the opportunities for innovation. If everyone is mimicking each other, localised, novel or nuanced approaches may struggle to be adopted.

The Las Vegas case studies have been used to interrogate the ways in which concepts of authenticity were used in art museums in a commercial tourist context. Cultural capital was accrued to gain distinction through adherence to legitimising art museum signifiers. In turn it was hoped that this would attract visitors and be a source of economic capital. Las Vegas's relationship to authenticity, its utilisation of recreations and facsimiles, and knowing adoption of elements from different time periods and locations, allowed for questions of authenticity that may not have been possible in other museums of art. Despite the expectations of journalists and art critics the Las Vegas museums were no more reproductions than other new art museums. Indeed, they showed that signifiers of legitimisation can be used in different ways and for different ends. However, through their pursuit of 'authentic' art museum signifiers, their references were less to Vegas and more to an idealised notion of what an art museum should be. Although the Las Vegas museum showed that legitimising signifiers can be used in different ways in relation to tourism and leisure they also showed that institutional isomorphism can limit responses to local factors. These 'experiments' with art museums in the city failed, but this may not mean that similar 'experiments' cannot succeed in the city of elsewhere.

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